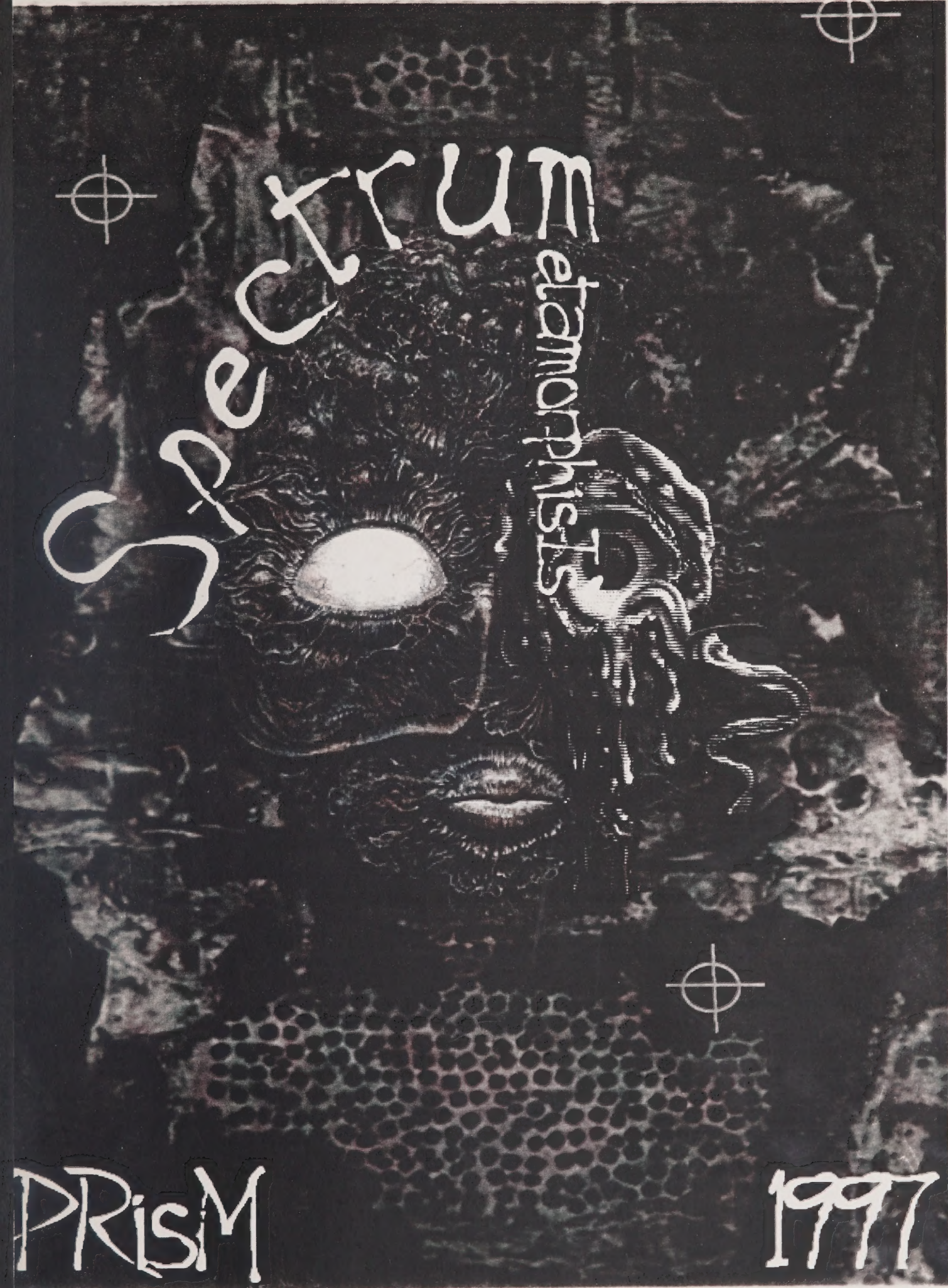
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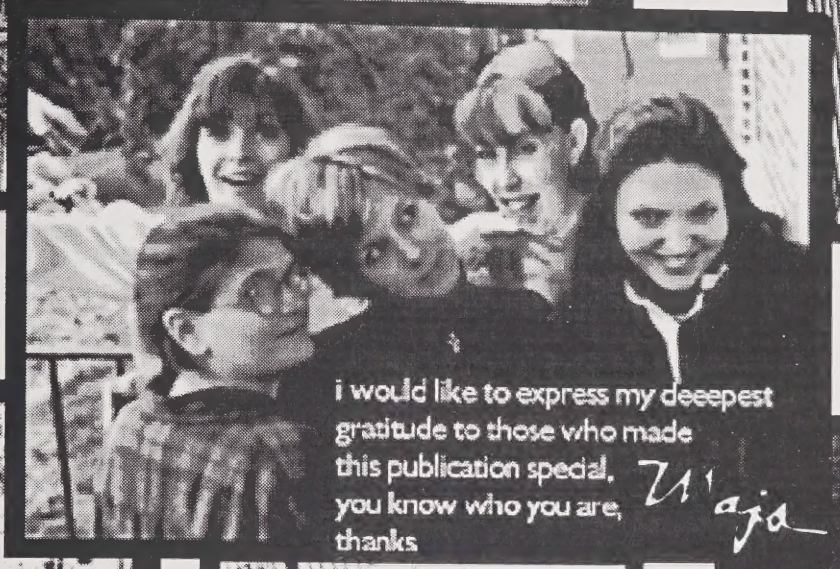


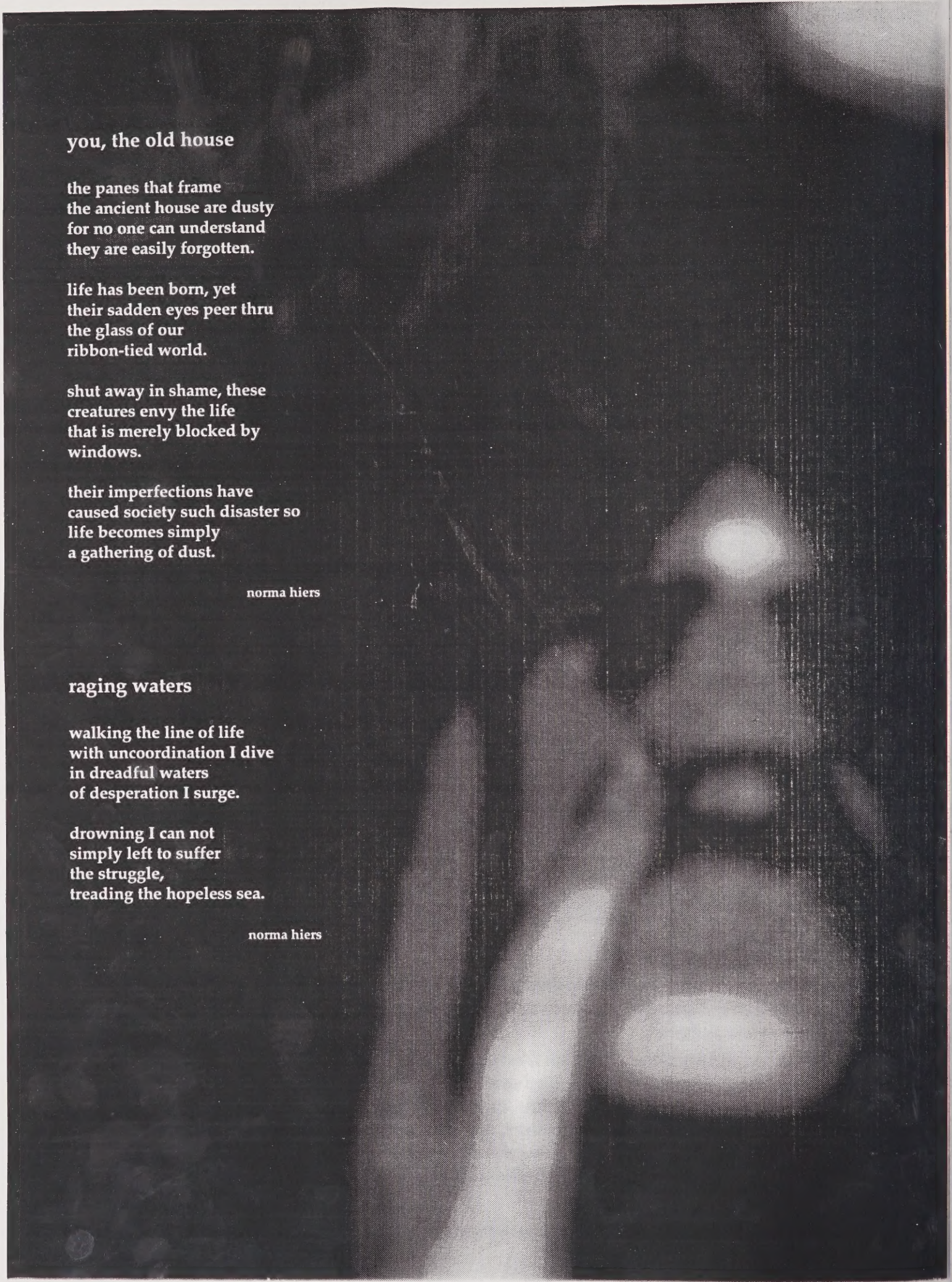
i would like to express my deeepest gratitude to those who made this publication special, you know who you are, thanks

Ui'aja

The Prism is an annual publication intended to display the year's work of students artists/writers of Peace College. Its contents are choosen and arranged by a student staff in a manner that they and they alone design according to their own aesthetic ideas and tastes.

Like all examples of art and literature, The Prism takes its place in the ongoing and vital conversation over the nature, purpose, and evaluation of art. It is a voice that makes itself heard, and in doing so asks others what they accept as literature, and what they deny. It is an image that makes itself seen, and thus asks if the purpose of art is to lead, to inspire, to elevate a culture, or to attack, deny, and ultimately alter a culture. It is a type of writing that expresses an artists feeling about a subject, that sets forth an individual's perspective, and in that moment also accepts that others will respond according to what they feel is beautiful, worthwhile, or artistic.

The staff invites you to participate in this moment with them.



you, the old house

the panes that frame
the ancient house are dusty
for no one can understand
they are easily forgotten.

life has been born, yet
their sadden eyes peer thru
the glass of our
ribbon-tied world.

shut away in shame, these
creatures envy the life
that is merely blocked by
windows.

their imperfections have
caused society such disaster so
life becomes simply
a gathering of dust.

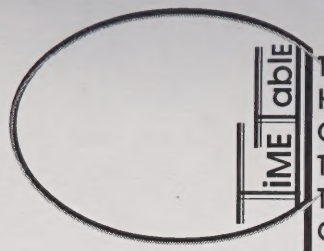
norma hiers

raging waters

walking the line of life
with uncoordination I dive
in dreadful waters
of desperation I surge.

drowning I can not
simply left to suffer
the struggle,
treading the hopeless sea.

norma hiers



Tick-tock
Hurry up
Gonna be late
Tick-tock
Tick-tock
Can't slow down!
Geysers rising forth
White crystals streaming from the tiny paper pack
Creamer splashing into the steamy volcano...
I'm suffocating in this cup of coffee
Don't stir too hard
Tick...
Tick...
Tick

-ginni smith

The Slacker

Oh, I'm perfectly fine stayin' at home
Don't worry about me--I got my GED
Me and the boys just hanging out
Smoking a joint,
I'll be all right.
Working for Uncle Leroy for some extra cash
Helps pay the rent, and usually a dime bag of hash
College can't be all it's cracked up to be
I've been through school once (well, eleventh grade)
and that's sho' enough f' me
Dere's opportunities here
once I get off probation next year.
Oh, all I need is a few bucks and a good, cold beer,
To Hell with all yo' fancy books and college gear.
This is the life, man.
I don't need such nonsense as a future plan.
Besides, I'll be alright..
I'm--sure?
Yeah, I'll be alright.

-heather evans

dirty rug that covers

hiding under this rug makes me wonder
sweep your dirt to gather around me.
it doesn't matter - I'm already filthy.
i'm dirty from such a heavy, heavy
rug covering my soul
confused, trapped in this dark dirty carpet.

i'm saddened, for you trample over the rug
that's placed over the carpet
where i am trying to hide.
i'm then corroded as you make your tracks.

i'm constantly being rained upon.
the pressure that makes such a mystery mud of me.
these dirty, wet, blackened tears
... of dark depression mold my existence,
forming the fragile yet indestructible shell.

... maybe you'll help - probably not,
you scorch me, burn me and hurt me
... but, maybe this once i'll crumble freely
and be cleansed
... by the ever-flowing tears.

-norma hiers

Bits of a Puzzle

by heather e. evans

"Well, it could be worse, you could be doing this for free," I whisper under my breath as I step one foot out of my '83 light green volvo onto the rocky gravel, straightening my oh-so-flattering Harold's drug store navy blue smock. I have only been working here for a month, but I swear it seems like an eternity. I could have it worse though, I could have to work her full time like some people. God, I would hate to be here from 9 to 5 everyday!

I push open the glass double doors, dreading the sound of the cow bell haphazardly strung by a pipe cleaner to the top hinge of the door. Making a dreadful sound, the bell might as well be saying, "I'm here! I'm here! Start putting me to work!" As I expected, Bob, the float-in-again-out-again manger, was at my heels.

"Susan, am I glad you're here," Bob says as he wipes his hand across his black mustache; he must have just finished eating; I smell Chinese food on his breath. "We've got tons of work to do on the floor tonight. We're having visitors tomorrow morning before opening. And, oh, when the new girl Alex gets here, show her the ropes, would ya?"

Evidently the drug store police were coming and now we had to rush to make up for ten months worth of goofing off.

"OK," I sighed out as Bob handed me next weeks sale signs to put out. I watched the top of bob's head encased in greasy black combed-over hair bob up and down the aisles until it disappeared in the back stockroom. Fumbling through the pockets of my smock, praying I wouldn't pull out anything disgusting from the night before, I find an unused portion of Bubble Yum; ooh, my lucky day. well, got to start passing the time somehow. I make my way down aisle 1, snapping the sale signs in front of each item, then aisle 2, 3, 4, 5....

"Hey Susan!" Bob's voice calls over aisles 6 and 7, "come over here and meet Alex!"

"Hold on," I yell, trying to juggle the signs in my hands. why couldn't he walk his lazy hair-club-for-men self over here, it is not like he's in the middle of an important task, unless he's scoping out the chicks in the feminine hygiene section.

"Hurry up," he somewhat politely groans.

"Hold on a minute." Who was this Alex girl anyway; why would she ever choose Harold's Discount Drugs as her place of employment. But then again, so had I. Alex, what a cool name. I've always liked those androgynous names ever since Sam on Who's the Boss; she was a cool chick in the eighties. Sure beats the name Susan.

"I'm coming," I yell, haphazardly dropping the shiny blue and white signs on the floor I shuffle my way down aisle 6 and 7 until I see the black tips of both their heads. I turned the corner only to see Bob's grinning face trying to impress this poor ignorant girl with his knowledge of drug store retail. After all, he had worked here for five years; what a mentor.

"Susan, this is Alex. She will be joining the Harold's team."

Alex looked like no girl I had ever seen before. I'm sure she was white, yet bits of her looked somewhat Egyptian: straight nose, slanted eyes, high forehead surrounded by a mass of black braids mixed with dread locks, a few even with hints of pink and blue thread in them. Her makeup was heavy over her unclear skin, yet she didn't look trashy, more like eccentric.

"Hi," I said. I never know what to say to somebody I don't know from beans.

"Hi," she replied back. Obviously she didn't know either.

Bob shifted his tie, "Well, I'm going to have you girls put up this stock. Susan, make sure you show her how to front-face the items; I'll be on aisle 3." Surprise, surprise, that's the feminine hygiene section.

"OK," I replied once again watching Bob bob away, then stop abruptly.

"Susan, pick this crap up on aisle 5, what were you thinking!" Bob belts out.

"Bob seems like a real ass," Alex blurts out to my surprise.

"Well, he has his moments."

We start pulling deodorants out of the gray plastic totes and putting them on the shelf. Silence. She seems so different from me. I don't consider myself a conformist; I dress pretty cool. My hair could use a little change; it's an all-one-length dirty-blonde bob, the style too many other girls have. She, however, had a style all her won: worn out khaki pants sagging in the rear ever so slightly, hugged by a long-waisted fuzzy turtleneck composed with black and silver specks, black Doc Martins, and of course topped off with the lovely blue smock that I was also sporting.

"How long have you been here," Alex lifts up from pulling merchandise out of the tote, removing a braid that had fallen into her eyes.

"About one month, just part time."

"Damn, must be nice; I work two jobs."

"Really, where else do you work?" I reply while removing a broken deodorant case from the tote. "Oooh, nasty, why do they send us these?" I pull a old Kleenex out of my smock and wipe the caky deodorant off my hand.

"That is gross. Oh, what were you asking?"

"About your second job."

"Oh, I work over at Progressive Designs," Alex says pulling the last deodorant from the tote. "Just as sort of a receptionist; I don't know a whole hell of a lot about art."

"That sounds pretty cool," I said pulling my hair behind by ears. Alex lifts up the empty tote.

"Where does he want me to put this?"

"In the stockroom, follow me."

"So, what do you do when you're not working here?" I could tell Alex was just being polite, this wasn't the most riveting of conversations.

"I'm a freshman over at State; I have no clue as to what I want to do."

"At least you are on the "right-track", Alex makes a snide face while making quotation marks with her hands. "All I hear is shit from my parents about what a horrible life I have set for myself."

Alex, unknowingly, puts me in an awkward situation. What I'm I supposed to say to that: Oh yeah, I'm on the right-track, I'm such a good girl, or Alex, you do lead a shitty life, shape up or ship out. So I say the next logical thing, "Oh." That's it, just oh.

We make our way in the stockroom, putting the gray tote in a stack with the others in the back corner of the hot, dusty room.

"What a dump," Alex retorts as she flops down on a cardboard box, fumbling through her pockets, pulling out a lighter and a box of Marlboro lights.

"My sentiments exactly," I mumble looking at my watch; it's 5:30. "Better not let Bob catch you lighting up when you're not clocked out, you would think the swimsuit edition of Sports Illustration had been canceled; he goes ballistic." Just then I could hear the faint sound of a toilet flush. "Quick, put your cigarettes up, Bob must have had another one of his stomach aches again."

Alex fumbles to clear any evidence of her smoking and hops up pretending to straighten the over-stocked merchandise pilled high on the gray metal stockroom shelves.

"Ya'll finished?" Bob questions as he tucks his worn short sleeve pin-striped shirt into his navy pants.

"Yeah, all done," I sigh.

Bob glances at his probably imitation Rolex watch. Who was he fooling, we knew his source of income came from Harold's. "Why

don't the both of you go ahead and take your supper break. I'll put Amy on the register."

"Sounds good," Alex says forgetting her pretend job of straightening.

"See ya in thirty, " Bob coolly replies like he was some hip DJ. We watch him stride out of the stockroom door.

"Where's there to eat around here?" Alex counts up the money she collected from her pockets.

I dread telling her that I, like the dork I am, brought my own lunch, but I did not have any extra money to ditch my homemade lunch and buy something else.

"W ell, I brought my own lunch, but there's a Subway just across the street. I guess I can take my lunch and eat over there with you."

"Do you mind?" Alex asks, straightening the last dollar from her pocket.

"No, come one, let's go. We've only got thirty minutes."

Alex and I open the stockroom door and tread our way down the center aisle towards the front door.

"Boop! Pardon us, we have failed to deactivate the inventory control panel from your purchase."

"What the hell is that," Alex yells over the security system.

"Boop! Pardon us, we have failed to deactivate the inventory control panel from your purchase."

"I don't know, did you accidentally step on a security tag?"

"Boop! Pardon us, we have failed to deactivate the inventory control panel from your purchase."

Alex fumbles around in her pockets and checks the bottom of her Doc Martins.

"Boop! Pardon us."

The squeak of Bob's shoes starts coming down the center aisle.

"We have failed to deactivate."

"C'mon!" Alex grabs my hand and pulls me out the door, the cowbell slamming behind us.

We head out to the gravel parking lot and over the grassy hill until we meet the highway. Checking traffic, we scoot across the road (me, with my oh-so-cool thermal insulated lunch box in one hand and a clear plastic water bottle in the other) running into the bright yellow Subway.

"I'm just going to sit here and wait for you," I say, sliding into the yellow fiber glass booth. I watch Alex as she orders, wondering if she is wondering what she was doing here with a girl like me. Taking my own lunch to Subway, how juvenile. I bet I look like one of those kids who is so picky they have to take their lunch everywhere.

Alex grabs her sub and a bag of Doritos in one hand and a drink in the other and makes her way back towards the booth. She scoots in. "So, what are you doing after work?" Alex asks, pulling a black rubber band out of her picket and pulling up the sides of her jet black hair, causing a few strands in stick out in all directions.

"I don't know, probably just lay around the apartment." If I had guts, or at least seemed the adventurous type, I would tell her something daring and exciting, but I would never come across as believable.

Alex pulls the sleeves of her fuzzy turtleneck up, revealing a few small bruises on her frail arms. " You ought to go downtown tonight, I hear there's going to be a pretty cool party."

"I'll think about it," I say while unwrapping my peanut butter sandwich, though I knew I would not go. My mind starts racing as to what caused the bruises on her arms. I haven't heard of many people falling on that area of the body. As curious as I am, I'm not going to ask her. I don't want to seem like a busy-body.

For a moment there is nothing but silence except for the chomping of sandwiches and the faint whale of Kenny G's saxophone over the radio. Trying to break the nervous silence, I wipe my mouth with the duck-printed paper towel that I had brought from home and jump back into the previous conversation.

"So are you going downtown tonight?" I ask, picking at the crust I had peeled off.

"Yeah, I think me and a couple of my friends are going. It bites that I have to come back here tomorrow. Are you working to?"

"Yeah, one to seven, can't wait," I reply sarcastically while walking to the trash can.

"Oh, Susan, let me get you number in case we need to trade shifts or something." Alex hands me a black eyeliner from her pocket and a napkin. I get her number too and stuff the scribbled Subway napkin into my pocket. Alex takes the last bite of her tuna sub and balls all of her trash together.

"I guess we better be heading back, huh?" Alex dumps her trash in the dirty yellow trash can.

"Yeah," I reply opening the door. Alex and I jog back across the street to Harold's; it is getting cold now. The cowbell acknowledges our arrival.

"Ladies, I'm glad you're back," Bob creeps out from behind the register. "We've been swamped with customers. Susan, start running the register up front; Alex, we'll put you on the sale signs Susan didn't finish." Bob cocks his head up, motioning for Alex to follow him. Alex, turning around and rolling her eyes towards me, follows Bob toward the back.

I began running the register, unable to talk to Alex; occasionally I would see her dreads glide behind the top of the aisles, yet we stayed in our own separate stations. While ringing up customers I couldn't help but think about her. Did she drop out of school? Where does she live? How does she wash her hair? This all seems a little psychotic, but if you came from where I did you wouldn't be use to anyone like her.

"That will be four dollars and seventy-three cents Ma'am."

I wonder if she lives with her parents?

"Thank you."

"Can I help you?"

Out of the corner of my eye I see a black blur head out the door.

"Twenty-three dollars and fourty-two cents."

Alex must have only had to work till 7:00.

"Would you like a bag with that?"

I reared my head up to see her pull off in a dark blue CRX, covered with Jane's Addiction, Nine Inch Nails and Morrissey stickers, skidding across the pavement and onto the highway.

The last few hours of work always seem the most excruciating. After finishing the last of Bob's mindless tasks, there was nothing left to do but check out the tabloids placed so invitingly at the register. My eyes gaze across the papers; the end of the world is coming, Lisa Marie Presley jealous of Michael's unborn baby, Baywatch beauty in sex scandal. I pick up the one with Pamela Lee spread out in her skimpy red swimsuit. Wow, just what has Pamela gotten herself into now or should I say whose bed ?

"Susan, go ahead and close your register up, I've got somewhere to be," Bob hurries to the office stripping himself from an garment that bore the Harold's log on it. "Hop to it."

His hastiness made me want to drudge along even more slowly, but hey, I wanted to jet on out too. I close the register, grab my pocketbook and walk out the door while stripping that stagnant smock off my body.

With a quick snap, I snatch open the slightly bent Volvo door, throwing my pocketbook and smock into the backseat along with the mess of wrinkled papers (usually bad test grades I would rather forget) littering the foot of the car. I hurriedly get into the car, immediately locking the door. Even a relatively nice place like Harold's Family Drug Store is swarming with lunatics, mostly of the redneck and Tupac Shakur kind. Cranking up the car, I spin off the gravel and onto the highway. Short as the ride home is, about ten minutes, I still get frustrated by the same old songs played at least one hundred times a day on the radio. If I hear another wail from Alanis Morisette, I think I will probably have to be committed. After unsuccessfully flipping through the stations filled with Van Halen, Mariah Carey, and (you guessed it) Alanis Morisette (I'll call Dorthea Dix Hospital in the morning), I pull into the asphalt parking lot of my apartment complex. Getting out of the car, key firmly ready in the hand, I do my famous fast-paced old lady mall-walker routine up to the door, fumbling with the lock until I am inside.

The apartment is dark with only moonlight creeping in through the cracks of the mini blinds. Flipping on the switch, I look at my watch: 9:30 Saturday night, my roommates must be at some drunken fraternity party. I make my way through the kitchen, grab some chips and salsa and head to the couch to spend another intimate evening with David Hasselhoff and the rest of the Baywatch bimbos. No matter how sexist the show, you can't look away. My theory is that there isn't one person in America between the ages of 15 and 30 that hasn't sat down and watched an entire episode of Baywatch, they just don't want to admit it.

I wake up suddenly to the piano music at the end of Saturday Night Live. I might need to get to sleep, got to go back to work tomorrow afternoon. I have to be in peak performance, can't let those loyal customers down. I drudge down the hall leaving my crumbs and a empty, yet still pungent, salsa jar on the coffee table.

"Let the party girls worry about that mess when they get home," I say to myself as I collapse on the bed, struggling in the dark to undo my bra and take off my socks, a ritual I often partake in when I'm too lazy to find both parts to my pajamas. Within a few minutes I'm out cold.

The phone abruptly wakes me. I hit the alarm clock three times before I comprehend the ring comes from the phone.

"Hello," I repeat, ready to go back to my dream-state.

"Susan," the voice on the other end replies. The voice sounds extremely familiar, yet I cannot quite place it.

"Hello," I repeat again. "Who is this?"

"Susan." The laughter starts getting louder, "It's Alex."

"Alex," I whispered under my breath, my mind racing to find a place for this name. Then it hits me, Alex from work.

"Susan, are you still there?"

"Yeah, I'm here," I mutter flipping on the blue lamp beside my bed. "Is something the matter?"

"No, everything's fine," Alex's voice seems a bit queasy, "I just need a favor, that's all."

Still a little bit confused, my mind races with ideas as to what she could want at 3:00 in the morning.

"What is it," I ask pulling back and blue and purple striped comforter. I sit straight up rubbing my eyes, still trying to convince my body to wake up.

"Well, I'm kind of in a bind." The laughter persists in the background. "I was wondering if you could give me a lift somewhere; I don't have my car with me." I could give me a lift somewhere; I don't have my car with me." I could hear Alex sniffling between sentences; It sounds like she is outside.

I think for a moment; do I really want to emerge from my nice warm bed into the cold? But, I, if stuck out in the cold with no ride, would want someone to do the same for me. Who am I kidding? I would never be in that situation. You couldn't catch me out after 11:30; I would pass out in the middle of whatever I was doing. Not from drunkenness, mind you, but from sleep deprivation.

"Well...," I reply still sitting, glued to the unmade bed. Oh, what the hell. If I don't pick her up then it would be really awkward at work

tomorrow. Sorry I didn't pick you up last night Alex, but I didn't have a reason, I just wanted to sleep.

"OK," I finally muttered out, "Where are you?"

"I'm at the pay phone at the corner of Ash and Hillsborough. Do you know where that is?"

"Yeah," I said. I knew exactly where the pay phone was, exactly where I didn't want to be at 3:30 in the morning.

"I'll be there in a few minutes," I stagger up turning the overhead light switch on.

"Thanks Susan," Alex hangs up.

What have I gotten myself into? The corner of Ash Hillsborough is rough enough looking in the daytime not to mention at night. I wouldn't even send someone as annoying as Michael Bolton down that corner.

I stumble around the compact room, picking up clothes, looking for the bra and socks I had previously flung off. After ransacking the room, I finally find the missing pieces of my wardrobe, putting them back on. I slip on a pair of Nikes, run a brush through my hair, throw a burgundy sweat-shirt over the blue knit shirt I had wore to work the day before. (I know I am definitely the queen of fashion tonight) Grabbing my keys, I head out the apartment door into the cold.

I climb back in the Volvo (it seemed like only five minutes ago that I was getting out of this thing), cranking up the car and head to my dreaded destination.

The street is silent, making me even more nervous than I already was. There is barely any sources of light except for a few random street lights. I turn off of Western Boulevard on to Ash street, my head lights peering through the darkness. The Volvo bumped and rattled down the pot-hole ridden road until it approaches a fuzzy glare of the street light near the corner. My vision is blurred at this distance, but I can make out Alex's silhouette at the pay phone along with another figure. As I drive up closer, I can tell she's with a guy - he looks like a rough character: saggy pants hugged by the chain connecting his wallet to his belt loop, a gigantic black and white 49ners jacket, and a orange toboggan covering up part of his sideburns and a scraggly red beard. Alex is facing him, her hands tucked in her black leather butterfly collar jacket wrapping it tightly around her shivering body.

As soon as I approach the corner, Alex sees me. Turning her head, her braids slapping the side of her face, she motions for me to wait a minute. I wish she would hurry up, this is extremely uncomfortable for me. My car sits running on the side of the road, Alex finishes whatever she was saying to the guy and runs to the car. I reach over to unlock the door.

"Thanks so much Susan," Alex says, she sounded exhausted. "You don't know how long I've been out there trying to find someone to pick me up." She pulls a cigarette out of her pocket, her hand quivering. The light from her lighter reveals blood-shot eyes.

"I really don't...," I stopped my sentence abruptly. I don't really like people smoking in my car, but just this once I decided to tolerate it. I don't want to seem like a prude.

"Where are we going," I ask putting the Volvo in drive.

"Just turn to the right right here," Alex motions, the sound of her leather jacket crumbling as she does so.

I didn't know what to say. Alex looks like hell. Obviously she must have looked pretty good when the evening began: silver leather pants, black boots, and a slightly see-through lace turtle neck covered by her black jacket. Her eyes, however, look tired and she seems nervous and jittery.

"Make a left here."

I couldn't help but wonder exactly where I was taking her. I had to ask.

"Where are we going?"

"Just to a friend's house."

"Are you spending the night?" I asked, clutching the wheel to see in the dark road.

"Huh?" Alex stares blankly out the window, "Oh yeah, I'm staying. Take a left here."

The farther we drove, the worse the neighborhood began to look: abandoned houses boarded up with wood, closed down gas stations, old alley-ways and abandoned dump-sites.

"It's the second building on the right." Alex points up to a dirty concrete block building. A few random people are scattered outside. One black guy with shoulder length dreadlocks and a pair of worn jean bell-bottoms is propped against the concrete building smoking a cigarette. Two figures are hidden at the dark side of the house, making out.

"Your friend lives here," I ask, knowing that I was sounding like a mother figure.

"Yeah," Alex mumbles, seemingly unaware of much of the conversation. Putting out her cigarette she points, "Just pull over right here." Alex quickly opens the door. "Look, thanks Susan. I owe you one." I could hear the faint sound of the Jane's Addiction song "Stop" coming from the house.

"But, I...," before I could finish my sentence she is out of the car, running to the old white front door. The door cracks open briefly. Alex, shivering in the cold, says a few words which I cannot hear. The door opens up wider and she slides inside.

For just a brief moment I sit there (after locking the door back of course). I guess my job is done. I wonder as to what this friend's place is like. Should I go inside and make sure Alex is OK? The guy with the dreads makes eye-contact with me. I glance down quickly at my watch, 4:15 am.

"God, I've got to be at work at one," I mutter to myself, putting the car in drive and doing a three point turn on the rocky road. I start skidding out of the neighborhood as fast as my little car could take me without falling apart. I pass the corner of Ash and Hillsborough expecting to see that guy Alex was with, but no one is there. Within a few minutes, I pull back into the apartment, making it as far as the couch before collapsing into a heavy sleep.

"Susan?" I feel a hand pushing gently on my shoulder. "Susan, are you all right?" My eyes peer open to see a fuzzy blond-headed figure before me.

"Huh?" I rub my eyes; it was one of my roommates, Cynthia.

"We've been worried about you," Cynthia takes a sip from her coffee mug.

Sure, I thought, they probably just wanted to use the couch.

"You've been asleep on the couch practically all afternoon."

"Huh," I repeat again sitting up. "What time is it anyway?"

Cynthia looks down at her Seiko watch, "1:30 in the afternoon."

"Oh no," I gasped, jumping up from the light blue couch racing down the hall. "I'm late for work!"

I rummage through my closet, pulling out a pair of navy dress pants and a gray long sleeve knit sweater, the only two items in my closet that didn't need either cleaning or ironing. "Bob's going to kill me," I mumble to myself while hopping up and down to put my pants on. Once dressed, I run to the bathroom down the hall, splash water on my face, give my teeth four god swipes with the toothbrush and run out the door while pulling my hair back in a ponytail.

It isn't until I get back into the car that I recall the night before: it seemed so long ago. I wonder how Alex is feeling this morning; she probably went to bed way after I did. I speed down the highway, managing to catch every traffic light imaginable. It is now 2:00; Bob is going to be some kind of ticked off.

The car just barely comes to a stop before I step out, not even bothering to put my smock on. I run across the gravel unto Harold's.

"Clang," the cowbell acknowledges my existence.

"Susan, is that you?" I could hear the jingling of bob's keys coming towards me.

"Bob, before you say anything, I know I'm late. I'm really sorry, I just overslept, but I got here as quick as I could. If you need me to stay later tonight I can. I am sooo sorry!"

"Well, look," Bob looks at me in the eyes, his face expressionless, "We can't dwell on that now, not with all that has been going on this morning." Bob takes out a handkerchief and wipes his forehead.

"What do you mean," I ask, wondering why Bob seemed so nervous and especially wondering why he wasn't mad at my lateness.

"Well, at 12:30 today we received a call," Bob puts the handkerchief back in his pocket.

"What about," I ask. Bob talks as if he is on a soap opera, pausing for what seems like five minutes between sentences.

"It's Alex." The moment Bob said those words my stomach dropped. For some reason I had a suspicion of what he was going to say next.

"Susan," Bob pauses again, "She died last night."

My body felt numb and weak. The florescent lights of Harold's seemed to be cooking me and the usually faint music was deafening.

"What?" I ask rather abruptly, my mind flashing back to scenes from the night before: Alex at the payphone, her jacket, her bloodshot eyes, taking her to the house. Oh God, why did I leave her there?

"Apparently, according to the police, she over-dosed on heroin," Bob pulls his handkerchief back out.

I say nothing else. I just stood there weak. Bob kept talking, but I could not hear him. The smells of the candy rack behind me are sickening to my stomach. I need air.

"Susan," Bob draws my attention back. "I know this is a bad time for the store, but we have to keep it business as usual. You know it is bad when something like this happens to anybody, don't get me wrong, but at least we didn't get, you know, attached to her. She only worked here a day."

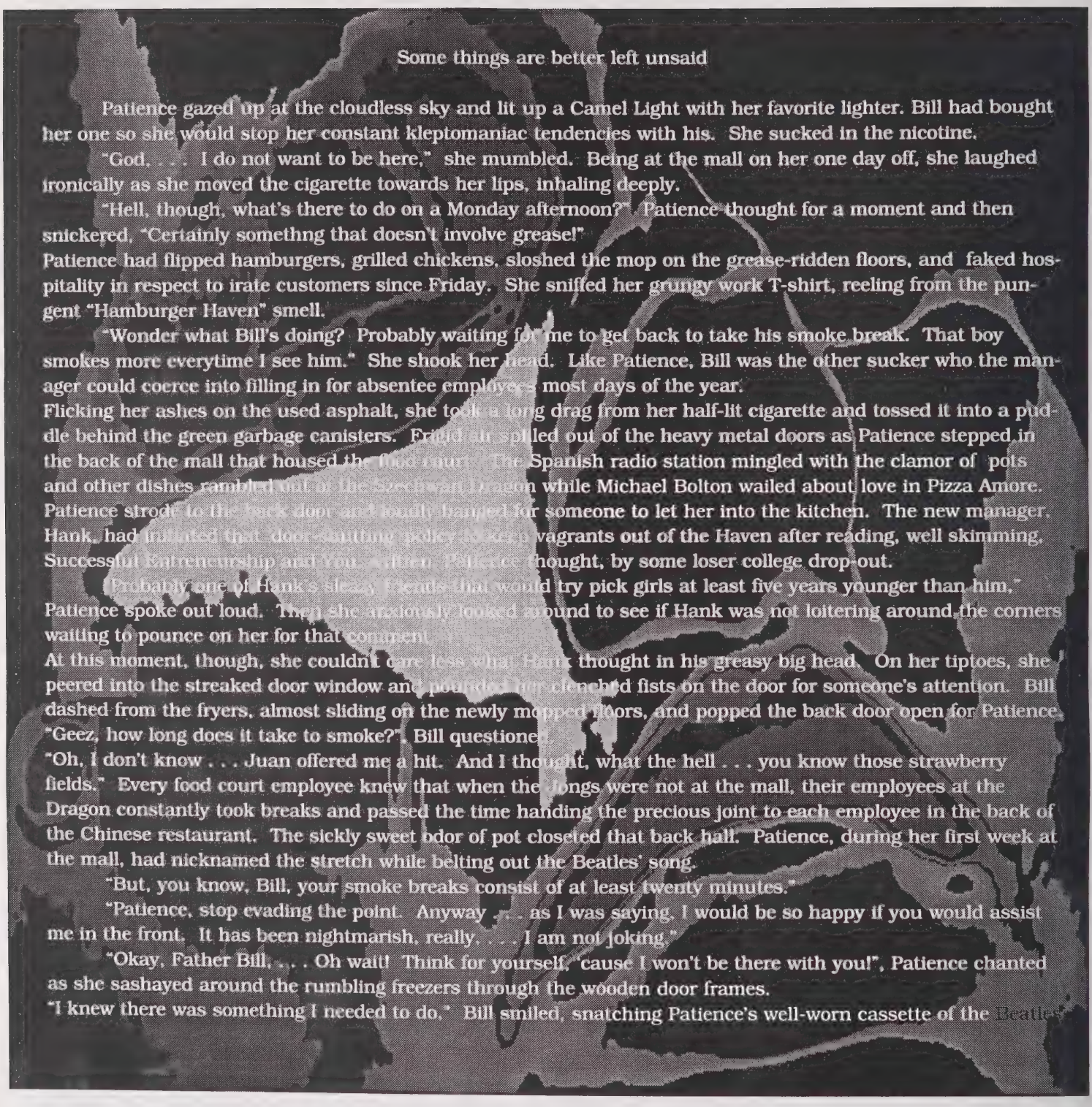
It was more than just a day for me. I prop my hand on one of the candy bar racks, still in silence. My body feels like warm mush inside.

"Susan," though still in work-mode, Bob's voice was concerning, "just run the register today, we won't worry about the floor till tomorrow."

"OK," I stutter, not fully aware of what Bob had been saying about the register. Bob walks away and so do I, right out the front door, the cow bell slamming behind me.

designed by heather e. evans
text layout labored by sAmAnThA jOnEs

to squirrelgrrl
because you love it soo good



Some things are better left unsaid

Patience gazed up at the cloudless sky and lit up a Camel Light with her favorite lighter. Bill had bought her one so she would stop her constant kleptomaniac tendencies with his. She sucked in the nicotine.

"God. . . . I do not want to be here," she mumbled. Being at the mall on her one day off, she laughed ironically as she moved the cigarette towards her lips, inhaling deeply.

"Hell, though, what's there to do on a Monday afternoon?" Patience thought for a moment and then snickered, "Certainly somethng that doesn't involve grease!"

Patience had flipped hamburgers, grilled chickens, sloshed the mop on the grease-ridden floors, and faked hospitality in respect to irate customers since Friday. She sniffed her grungy work T-shirt, reeling from the pungent "Hamburger Haven" smell.

"Wonder what Bill's doing? Probably waiting for me to get back to take his smoke break. That boy smokes more everytime I see him." She shook her head. Like Patience, Bill was the other sucker who the manager could coerce into filling in for absentee employees most days of the year.

Flicking her ashes on the used asphalt, she took a long drag from her half-lit cigarette and tossed it into a puddle behind the green garbage canisters. Fried air spilled out of the heavy metal doors as Patience stepped in the back of the mall that housed the food court. The Spanish radio station mingled with the clamor of pots and other dishes rambled out of the Szechwan Dragon while Michael Bolton wailed about love in Pizza Amore. Patience strode to the back door and loudly banged for someone to let her into the kitchen. The new manager, Hank, had initiated that door-anything policy to keep vagrants out of the Haven after reading, well skimming, Successful Entrepreneurship and You, written, Patience thought, by some loser college drop-out.

"Probably one of Hank's sleazy friends that would try pick girls at least five years younger than him," Patience spoke out loud. Then she anxiously looked around to see if Hank was not loitering around the corners waiting to pounce on her for that comment.

At this moment, though, she couldn't care less what Hank thought in his greasy big head. On her tiptoes, she peered into the streaked door window and pounded her clenched fists on the door for someone's attention. Bill dashed from the fryers, almost sliding on the newly mopped floors, and popped the back door open for Patience.

"Geez, how long does it take to smoke?", Bill questioned.

"Oh, I don't know . . . Juan offered me a hit. And I thought, what the hell . . . you know those strawberry fields." Every food court employee knew that when the bongs were not at the mall, their employees at the Dragon constantly took breaks and passed the time handing the precious joint to each employee in the back of the Chinese restaurant. The sickly sweet odor of pot closeted that back hall. Patience, during her first week at the mall, had nicknamed the stretch while belting out the Beatles' song.

"But, you know, Bill, your smoke breaks consist of at least twenty minutes."

"Patience, stop evading the point. Anyway . . . as I was saying, I would be so happy if you would assist me in the front. It has been nightmarish, really. . . . I am not joking."

"Okay, Father Bill, . . . Oh wait! Think for yourself, 'cause I won't be there with you!", Patience chanted as she sashayed around the rumbling freezers through the wooden door frames.

"I knew there was something I needed to do." Bill smiled, snatching Patience's well-worn cassette of the Beatles'

"true feelings" katherine costa

Rubber Soul album. He lifted his work shirt, unzipped his pants, and slipped in the tape.

"Brother, you can have the tape now!," Patience smirked.

"I thought so. Ah, . . . and now for some Beethoven." Bill fumbled with the knobs, settling for NPR's Classical Hour. Patience loudly groaned, then she pretended to trudge up to the registers. As she peered through the front window, she noticed that someone else was attending to the customers.

"Yes ma'am, . . . chicken salad special with fries and a Coke," Allison, a Cataclysmic Coffee employee, said with a syrupy grin. "Will that be for here or to go?", she asked as the brown liquid sloshed and fizzed into the small paper cup.

"For here, darling," the leathery woman crooned, fishing through her enormous gold and silver vinyl handbag. Moments later, she handed Allison a ten-dollar bill that had nestled between her Discover and Mastercard Gold card. Patience shivered and inhaled once again, only to gag at the hint of Chanel No. 5. She slowly stepped backwards into the 'grill pit' where Bill was shaking off excess water from his newly washed right hand and grabbing the order off the rattling machine with his left.

"What's Allison doing here?", Patience spoke with a guarded tone. She disliked most of the girls her best friend dated, but she despised Allison. Actually, whenever she came into contact with the person whom she privately called 'the creature who robbed the Avon lady', Patience imagined herself on a medieval rack and having Willie Nelson's twangy voice penetrate every fiber of her body.

"She's at the coffee shop tonight."

"The coffee shop is on the other side of the mall." Patience wildly gestured with her arms. Bill glopped chicken salad on a lightly toasted bun, mashing the top slice on the concoction. He handed the tray to Patience and banged the ice cream scoop used for chicken salad on the old plastic lemon container. He turned to face Patience, opening and quickly closing his mouth as Allison whizzed into the room and snatched the tray Patience was teetering. She instantly grabbed the metal tongs and clamped down upon a handful of lukewarm French fries, unloading mushy mass on the Styrofoam plate. She snatched the receipt dangling from Bill's fingertips and scurried to the front. Patience rolled her eyes at Bill who remained startled at the situation.

Allison entered the 'grill pit' with a glassy gaze. Her powdered face transformed into a scowl when she saw Patience and Bill.

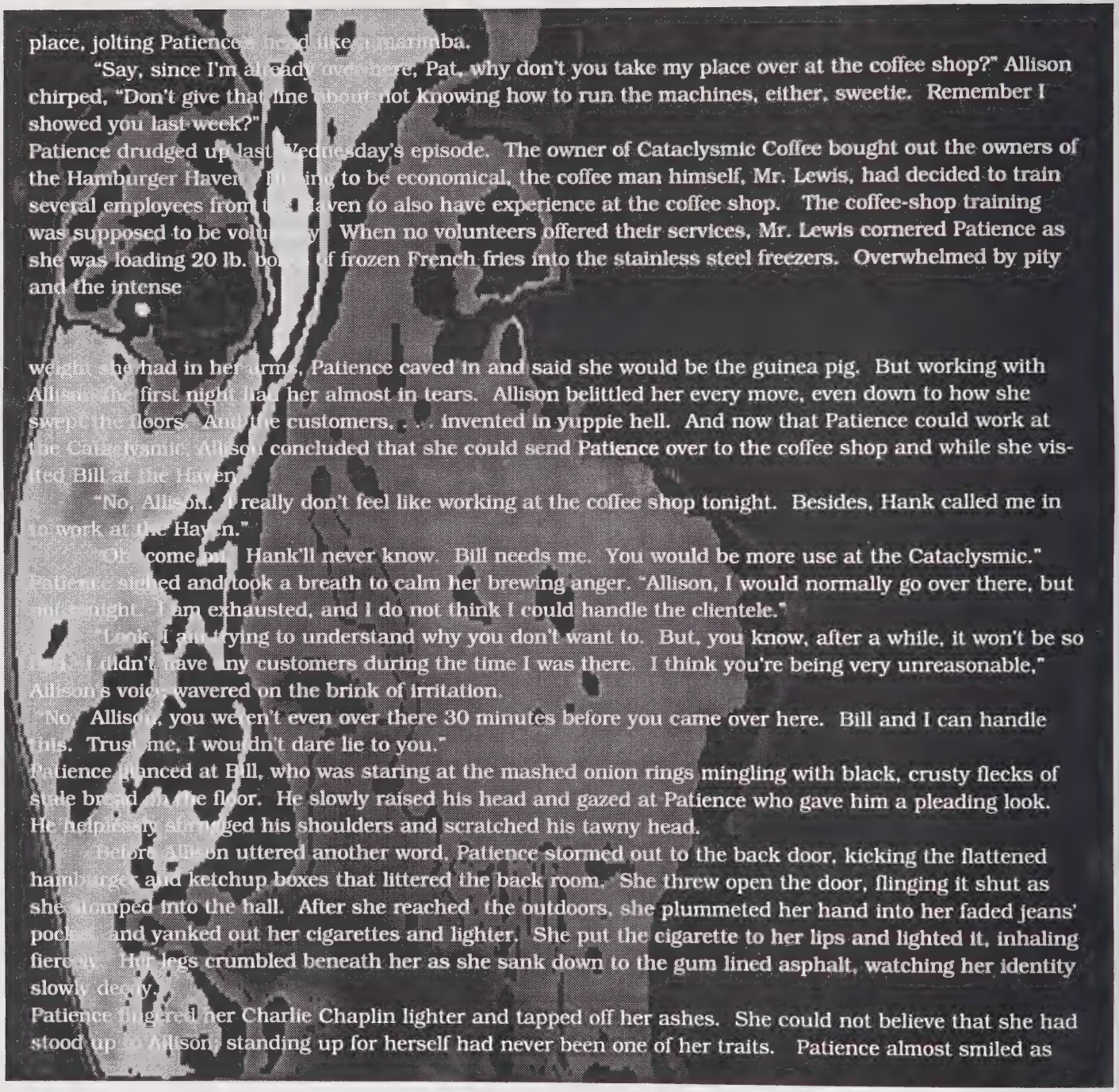
"Pat, sweetie, wasn't your break over 20 minutes ago? When I came over here to check on Billy, he was swamped." Patience could tolerate her mother for insisting to call her 'Pat' because she had to, but Allison had overstepped her boundaries. Before she answered, she looked at Bill, who mouthed 'be nice', and she decided to try to be cordial even though she wanted to rip Allison's eyeballs out of their sockets.

"Aren't you supposed to be at the coffee shop?" Patience carefully responded.

"Well, yes and no. I've had no customers since I've been here. I didn't have anything to do, so I decided to pop over here. Besides, Bill needed someone. I couldn't leave my little smoopie all alone." Patience shook her head.

"Well, . . ."

Bill interrupted, "I am just glad to have somebody over here tonight with Crystal having a broken arm. Patience, you're the greatest." He curved his flanneled arm across Patience's small shoulders. She, in turn,



place, jolting Patience's head like a marimba.

"Say, since I'm already over here, Pat, why don't you take my place over at the coffee shop?" Allison chirped, "Don't give that line about not knowing how to run the machines, either, sweetie. Remember I showed you last week?"

Patience drudged up last Wednesday's episode. The owner of Cataclysmic Coffee bought out the owners of the Hamburger Haven. Planning to be economical, the coffee man himself, Mr. Lewis, had decided to train several employees from the Haven to also have experience at the coffee shop. The coffee-shop training was supposed to be voluntary. When no volunteers offered their services, Mr. Lewis cornered Patience as she was loading 20 lb. boxes of frozen French fries into the stainless steel freezers. Overwhelmed by pity and the intense

weight she had in her arms, Patience caved in and said she would be the guinea pig. But working with Allison the first night had her almost in tears. Allison belittled her every move, even down to how she swept the floors. And the customers. . . . invented in yuppie hell. And now that Patience could work at the Cataclysmic, Allison concluded that she could send Patience over to the coffee shop and while she visited Bill at the Haven.

"No, Allison. I really don't feel like working at the coffee shop tonight. Besides, Hank called me in to work at the Haven."

"Oh, come on. Hank'll never know. Bill needs me. You would be more use at the Cataclysmic."

Patience sighed and took a breath to calm her brewing anger. "Allison, I would normally go over there, but not tonight. I am exhausted, and I do not think I could handle the clientele."

"Look, I am trying to understand why you don't want to. But, you know, after a while, it won't be so busy. I didn't have any customers during the time I was there. I think you're being very unreasonable," Allison's voice wavered on the brink of irritation.

"No, Allison, you weren't even over there 30 minutes before you came over here. Bill and I can handle this. Trust me, I wouldn't dare lie to you."

Patience glanced at Bill, who was staring at the mashed onion rings mingling with black, crusty flecks of stale bread on the floor. He slowly raised his head and gazed at Patience who gave him a pleading look. He helplessly shrugged his shoulders and scratched his tawny head.

Before Allison uttered another word, Patience stormed out to the back door, kicking the flattened hamburger and ketchup boxes that littered the back room. She threw open the door, flinging it shut as she stomped into the hall. After she reached the outdoors, she plummeted her hand into her faded jeans' pocket and yanked out her cigarettes and lighter. She put the cigarette to her lips and lighted it, inhaling fiercely. Her legs crumbled beneath her as she sank down to the gum lined asphalt, watching her identity slowly decay.

Patience fingered her Charlie Chaplin lighter and tapped off her ashes. She could not believe that she had stood up to Allison; standing up for herself had never been one of her traits. Patience almost smiled as

flipped her cigarette in a puddle, staring at the wrapped tobacco suck up the blackened water. Her loose shirt formed a tent over her knees; she, then, her head in her cotton covered lap. Patience recalled the first time that she met Allison.

* * * * * * * * * *

"Patience, there is someone I want you to meet," Bill blared from the back room. Patience grabbed up the next order from the machine. While snatching a to-go box, her arm collided with the metal tongs loitering on the counter near the fryers. In efforts to save them from tumbling into the spurting greasy pit, she knocked over the hot dog buns warming near the pot of simmering barbecue. She reached for the buns, only to trip over the broom casually leaning on the table that housed the to-go boxes and extra Styrofoam plates. As Patience landed on the floor, she bellowed several volatile phrases.

"Patience, stop goofing around and get back here," Bill walked to where Patience was sprawled on the floor, covered in a white box-breaded array, rubbing her thigh. Patience scowled. Bill lent his hand and lifted her up to her feet.

"Sweetie, if you were really hurt, I'd be concerned." He grinned and gave her a bear hug. Then, together, the two of them threw the jumbled boxes on the shelf.

"Patience, don't worry about the rest. We'll get it tonight. What the customers don't know won't hurt them. Now, come on."

"Thank-you for your almighty command. So, . . . why all the impatience? I am simply crumbling with suspense."

"Cut the sarcasm, doll face. I'm serious." Patience flashed Bill her sweetest smile, and Bill frowned.

"Patience, please. I need your utmost grace. I think I've found someone special. She works at the Cataclysmic. I . . . I want you to meet her. You know Allison, don't you?" Bill's eyes glazed over with ecstasy.

"No . . . wait a minute . . .the blond-haired one that no one can hold a decent conversation with?" Bill shook his head in the affirmative, yet his face still held the silly, lovesick grin.

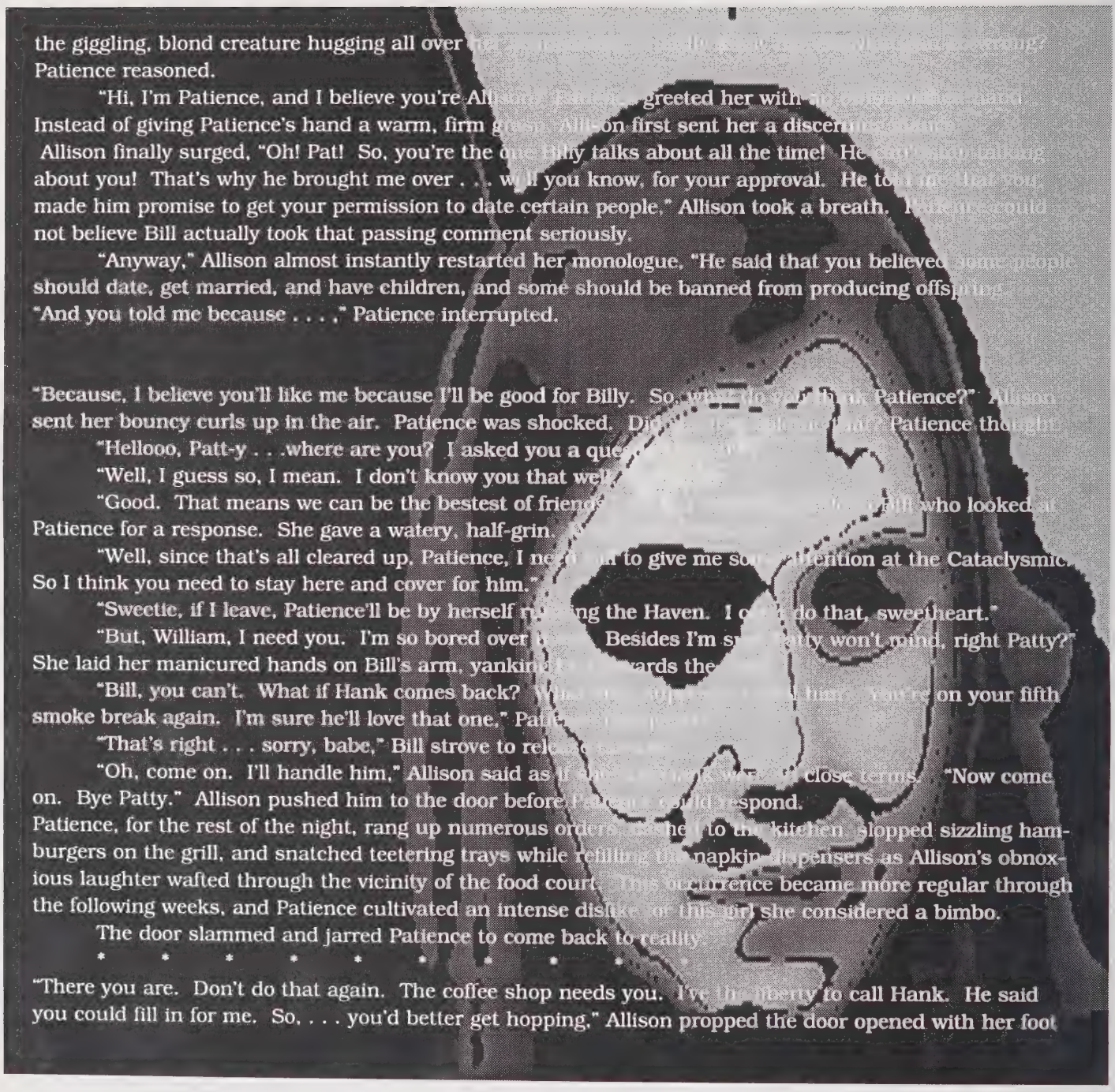
"Bill, are you okay? You've got this weird look on your face." Patience cocked her head to observe Bill.

"Oh, . . . I . . .," An interrupting voice wailed from the back.

"Billy, where are you? I'm lonely!" Patience grinned at Bill.

"Billy?" she said, trying not to laugh. A figure in black leggings, then, pirouetted across the floor. Patience's mouth dropped. Patience had seen Bill leave the table at their frequent smoke breaks to visit the coffee shop, but she had no clue he was over with Allison. He told her that he was learning to become a coffee connoisseur, for Bill had constantly talked of opening a coffee bar ever since he 'had the coffee experience' in Santa Monica when he took an cross-country excursion after breaking up with his last girlfriend. He, Bill informed Patience, hoped to find solace in bachelorhood. Out West, he discovered that instead of coffee shops, the new trend was coffee bars.

"Sort of like an alcoholic bar, but it's a coffee bar. Monin syrups line the back wall, and people go up to the counter and order coffee drinks. And guess what, I had a tall skinny. It's a double latte with a dash of hazelnut Monin syrup," Bill had explained in response to Patience's puzzled expression. She took one look at



the giggling, blond creature hugging all over [illegible] wrong? Patience reasoned.

"Hi, I'm Patience, and I believe you're Al[illegible] greeted her with [illegible] Instead of giving Patience's hand a warm, firm g[illegible] Allison first sent her a discern[illegible]

Allison finally surged, "Oh! Pat! So, you're the o[illegible] Billy talks about all the time! He [illegible] talking about you! That's why he brought me over . . . w[illegible] you know, for your approval. He to[illegible] that you made him promise to get your permission to date certain people." Allison took a breath. [illegible] could not believe Bill actually took that passing comment seriously.

"Anyway," Allison almost instantly restarted her monologue. "He said that you believed [illegible] people should date, get married, and have children, and some should be banned from producing offsprings."

"And you told me because . . . ," Patience interrupted.

"Because, I believe you'll like me because I'll be good for Billy. So, [illegible] Patience?" Allison sent her bouncy curls up in the air. Patience was shocked. Di[illegible] Patience thought.

"Hellooo, Patt-y . . .where are you? I asked you a que[illegible]

"Well, I guess so, I mean. I don't know you that wel[illegible]

"Good. That means we can be the bestest of friend[illegible] Bill who looked at Patience for a response. She gave a watery, half-grin.

"Well, since that's all cleared up, Patience, I ne[illegible] to give me so[illegible] attention at the Cataclysmic. So I think you need to stay here and cover for him."

"Sweetie, if I leave, Patience'll be by herself r[illegible]ng the Haven. I o[illegible] do that, sweetheart."

"But, William, I need you. I'm so bored over [illegible] Besides I'm s[illegible]tty won't mind, right Patty?" She laid her manicured hands on Bill's arm, yankin[illegible]wards the [illegible]

"Bill, you can't. What if Hank comes back? [illegible] [illegible] time. You're on your fifth smoke break again. I'm sure he'll love that one," Pat[illegible]

"That's right . . . sorry, babe," Bill strove to rele[illegible]

"Oh, come on. I'll handle him," Allison said as if [illegible] close terms. "Now come on. Bye Patty." Allison pushed him to the door before Patience could respond.

Patience, for the rest of the night, rang up numerous orders, [illegible] to the kitchen, slopped sizzling hamburgers on the grill, and snatched teetering trays while refilling the napkin dispensers as Allison's obnoxious laughter wafted through the vicinity of the food court. This occurrence became more regular through the following weeks, and Patience cultivated an intense dislike for this girl she considered a bimbo.

The door slammed and jarred Patience to come back to reality.

* * * * * * * * * *

"There you are. Don't do that again. The coffee shop needs you. I've [illegible] liberty to call Hank. He said you could fill in for me. So, . . . you'd better get hopping." Allison propped the door opened with her foot

or Patience. Patience stared at her for a moment. She gulped and determined to reveal her true feelings.

"No. I will not."

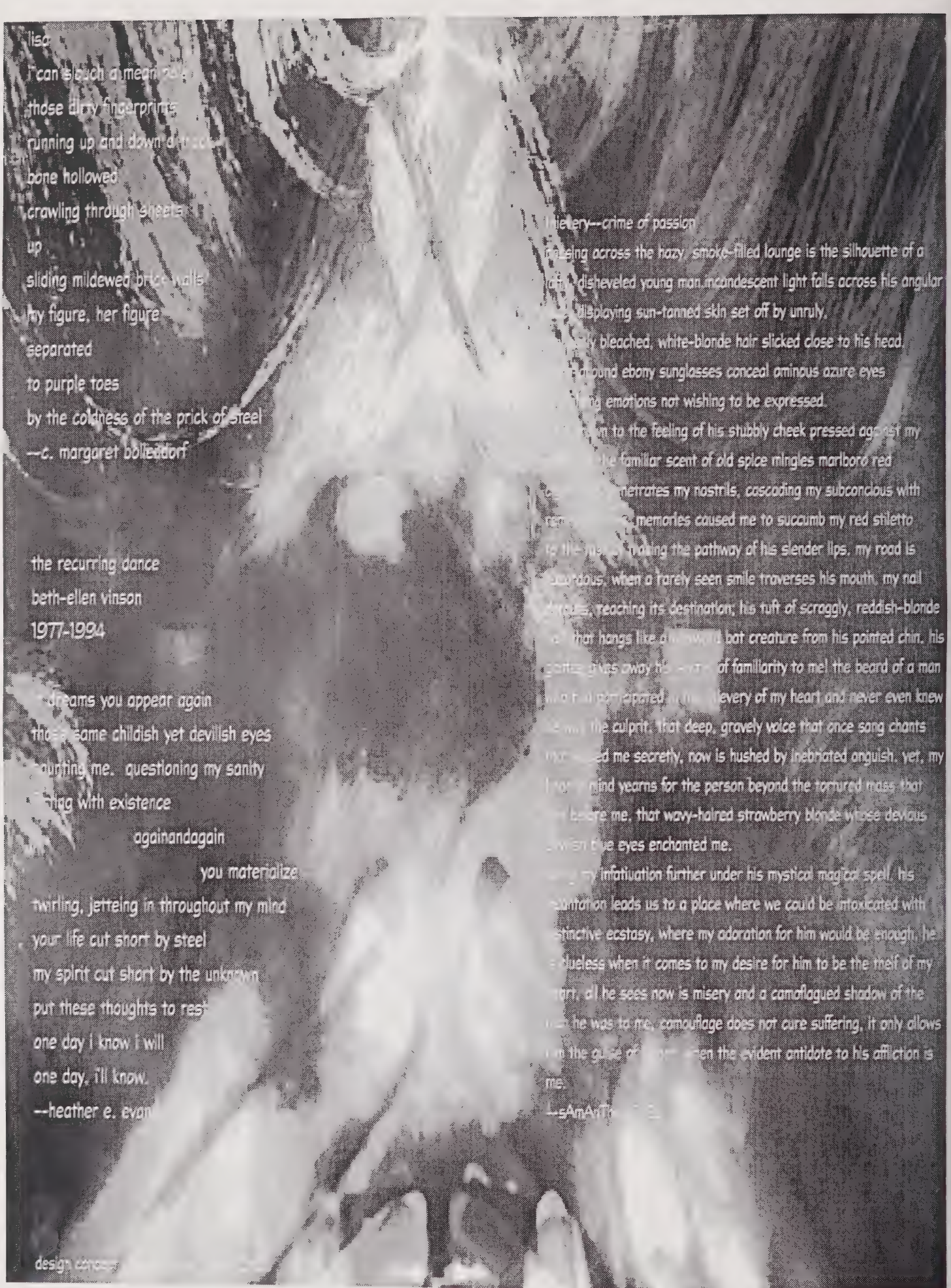
"Look, I'm not going to tell you twice. I can and I will call Hank. Don't mess with me." Allison lost her annoying giggle and began to sneer. Patience blinked her eyes and straighted her back.

"I said no. Even if it means losing my job, I am not going to be your lackey anymore, Allison. Do it your own damn self, Allison. You are not my friend, and you are not my boss," Patience saw Bill walk towards where Allison was standing. "Sorry, Bill. Please understand, this nothing to do with you, but your girlfriend is a sniveling, haughty creature who has nothing better to do with herself but fight other people at Hudson Belk's cosmetic sale. Bye Bill, have a nice life and don't call me until you wake up from your delusions of happiness with that," Patience said, pointing at the open-mouthed Allison.

Patience waved and waltzed away, reaching into each of her pockets with both hands. She dangled her keys with one hand and lighted another cigarette with the other. She looked back at the door and saw Bill standing alone at the edge. When he realized that Patience was looking at him, he motioned for her to come halfway.

"Some things are better left unsaid," She mumbled. Exhaling, she smiled as the afternoon sun gave its farewell to a spectacular twilight

A Tale From the Mall
Ginny Smith



lisa

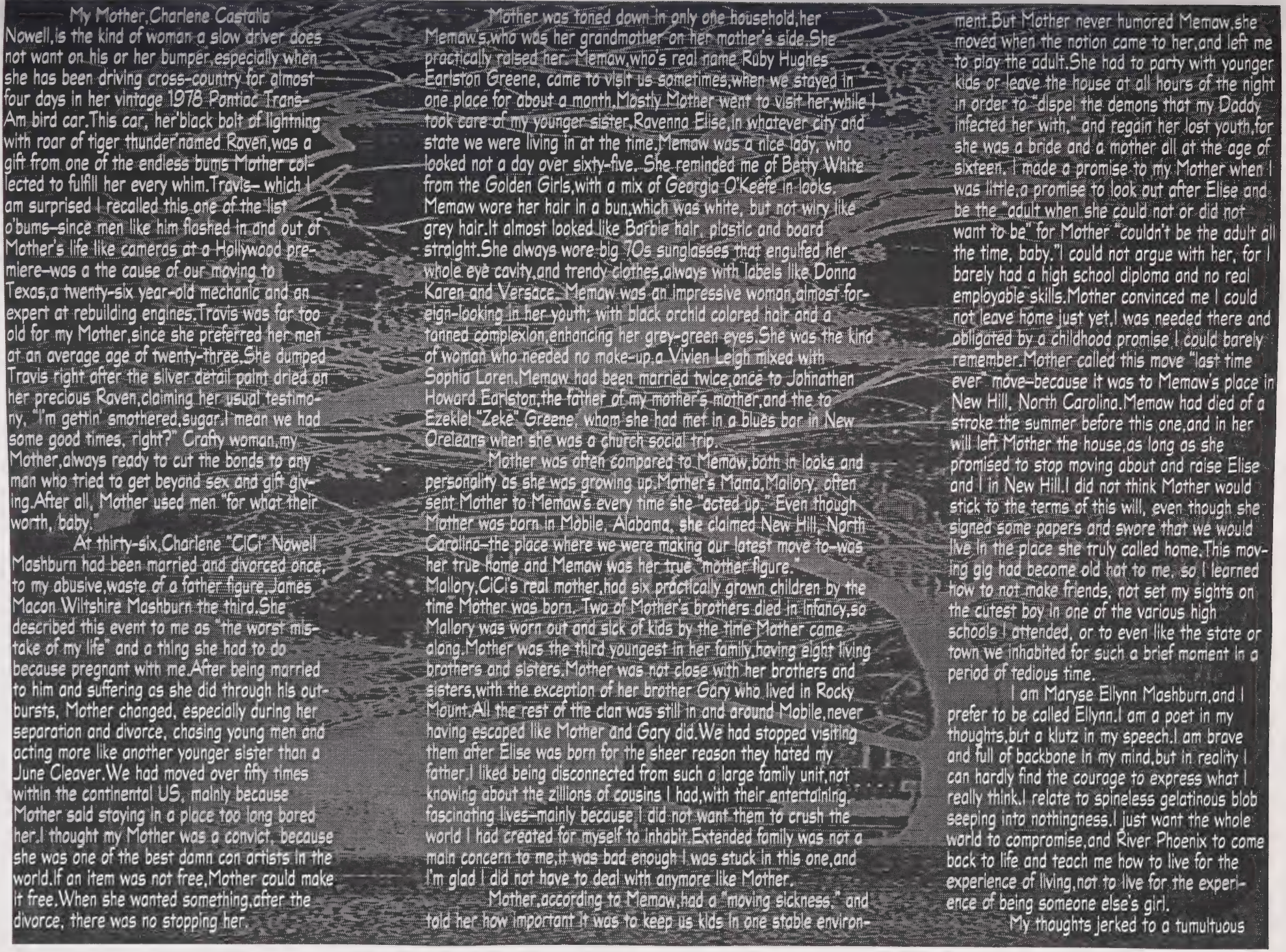
i can still catch a mean rat
those dirty fingerprints
running up and down my
bone hollowed
crawling through sheets
up
sliding mildewed brick walls
my figure, her figure
separated
to purple toes
by the coldness of the prick of steel
--c. margaret bollendorf

the recurring dance
beth-ellen vinson
1977-1994

dreams you appear again
those same childish yet devilish eyes
haunting me. questioning my sanity
living with existence
againandagain
you materialize
twirling, jetteling in throughout my mind
your life cut short by steel
my spirit cut short by the unknown
put these thoughts to rest
one day i know i will
one day, i'll know.
--heather e. evan

design concept

thievery--crime of passion
passing across the hazy, smoke-filled lounge is the silhouette of a
tall, dishevelled young man.incandescent light falls across his angular
face displaying sun-tanned skin set off by unruly,
naturally bleached, white-blonde hair slicked close to his head.
Wrap around ebony sunglasses conceal aminous azure eyes
harboring emotions not wishing to be expressed.
I succumb to the feeling of his stubbly cheek pressed against my
own. The familar scent of old spice mingles marlboro red
penetrates my nostrils, cascading my subconcious with
memories caused me to succumb my red stiletto
to the floor, making the pathway of his slender lips. my road is
treacherous, when a rarely seen smile traverses his mouth. my nail
digresses, reaching its destination; his tuft of scraggly, reddish-blonde
hair that hangs like a drowned bat creature from his pointed chin. his
gentle gaze was my sign of familiarity to me! the beard of a man
who had participated in the slavery of my heart and never even knew
he was the culprit. that deep, gravely voice that once sang chants
which aroused me secretly, now is hushed by inebriated anguish. yet, my
inner mind yearns for the person beyond the tortured mass that
lies before me. that wavy-haired strawberry blonde whose devious
green blue eyes enchanted me.
Letting my infatuation further under his mystical magical spell. his
intuition leads us to a place where we could be intoxicated with
instinctive ecstasy, where my adoration for him would be enough. he
is clueless when it comes to my desire for him to be the thief of my
heart. all he sees now is misery and a camoflagued shadow of the
man he was to me. camouflage does not cure suffering, it only allows
one the guise of normalcy. when the evident antidote to his affliction is
me.
--sAmAnTh



My Mother,Charlene Castalia Nowell,is the kind of woman a slow driver does not want on his or her bumper,especially when she has been driving cross-country for almost four days in her vintage 1978 Pontiac Trans-Am bird car.This car, her'black bolt of lightning with roar of tiger thunder'named Raven,was a gift from one of the endless bums Mother collected to fulfill her every whim.Travis– which I am surprised I recalled this one of the list o'bums–since men like him flashed in and out of Mother's life like cameras at a Hollywood premiere–was a the cause of our moving to Texas,a twenty-six year-old mechanic and an expert at rebuilding engines.Travis was far too old for my Mother,since she preferred her men at an average age of twenty-three.She dumped Travis right after the silver detail paint dried on her precious Raven,claiming her usual testimony, "I'm gettin' smothered,sugar.I mean we had some good times, right?" Crafty woman,my Mother,always ready to cut the bonds to any man who tried to get beyond sex and gift giving.After all, Mother used men "for what their worth, baby."

At thirty-six,Charlene "CiCi" Nowell Mashburn had been married and divorced once, to my abusive,waste of a father figure,James Macon Wiltshire Mashburn the third.She described this event to me as "the worst mistake of my life" and a thing she had to do because pregnant with me.After being married to him and suffering as she did through his outbursts, Mother changed, especially during her separation and divorce, chasing young men and acting more like another younger sister than a June Cleaver.We had moved over fifty times within the continental US, mainly because Mother said staying in a place too long bored her.I thought my Mother was a convict, because she was one of the best damn con artists in the world.If an item was not free,Mother could make it free.When she wanted something,after the divorce, there was no stopping her.

Mother was toned down in only one household,her Memaw's,who was her grandmother on her mother's side.She practically raised her. Memaw,who's real name Ruby Hughes Earlston Greene, came to visit us sometimes,when we stayed in one place for about a month.Mostly Mother went to visit her,while I took care of my younger sister,Ravenna Elise,in whatever city and state we were living in at the time.Memaw was a nice lady, who looked not a day over sixty-five. She reminded me of Betty White from the Golden Girls,with a mix of Georgia O'Keefe in looks. Memaw wore her hair in a bun,which was white, but not wiry like grey hair.It almost looked like Barbie hair, plastic and board straight.She always wore big 70s sunglasses that engulfed her whole eye cavity,and trendy clothes,always with labels like Donna Karen and Versace. Memaw was an impressive woman,almost foreign-looking in her youth, with black orchid colored hair and a tanned complexion,enhancing her grey-green eyes.She was the kind of woman who needed no make-up,a Vivien Leigh mixed with Sophia Loren.Memaw had been married twice,once to Johnathen Howard Earlston,the father of my mother's mother,and the to Ezekiel "Zeke" Greene, whom she had met in a blues bar in New Orleans when she was a church social trip.

Mother was often compared to Memaw,both in looks and personality as she was growing up.Mother's Mama,Mallory, often sent Mother to Memaw's every time she "acted up." Even though Mother was born in Mobile, Alabama, she claimed New Hill, North Carolina–the place where we were making our latest move to–was her true home and Memaw was her true "mother figure." Mallory,CiCi's real mother,had six practically grown children by the time Mother was born. Two of Mother's brothers died in infancy,so Mallory was worn out and sick of kids by the time Mother came along.Mother was the third youngest in her family,having eight living brothers and sisters.Mother was not close with her brothers and sisters,with the exception of her brother Gary who lived in Rocky Mount.All the rest of the clan was still in and around Mobile,never having escaped like Mother and Gary did.We had stopped visiting them after Elise was born for the sheer reason they hated my father.I liked being disconnected from such a large family unit,not knowing about the zillions of cousins I had,with their entertaining, fascinating lives–mainly because I did not want them to crush the world I had created for myself to inhabit.Extended family was not a main concern to me,it was bad enough I was stuck in this one,and I'm glad I did not have to deal with anymore like Mother.

Mother,according to Memaw,had a "moving sickness," and told her how important it was to keep us kids in one stable environment.But Mother never humored Memaw,she moved when the notion came to her,and left me to play the adult.She had to party with younger kids or leave the house at all hours of the night in order to "dispel the demons that my Daddy infected her with," and regain her lost youth,for she was a bride and a mother all at the age of sixteen. I made a promise to my Mother when I was little,a promise to look out after Elise and be the "adult when she could not or did not want to be" for Mother "couldn't be the adult all the time, baby."I could not argue with her, for I barely had a high school diploma and no real employable skills.Mother convinced me I could not leave home just yet,I was needed there and obligated by a childhood promise I could barely remember.Mother called this move "last time ever" move–because it was to Memaw's place in New Hill, North Carolina.Memaw had died of a stroke the summer before this one,and in her will left Mother the house,as long as she promised to stop moving about and raise Elise and I in New Hill.I did not think Mother would stick to the terms of this will, even though she signed some papers and swore that we would live in the place she truly called home.This moving gig had become old hat to me, so I learned how to not make friends, not set my sights on the cutest boy in one of the various high schools I attended, or to even like the state or town we inhabited for such a brief moment in a period of tedious time.

I am Maryse Ellynn Mashburn,and I prefer to be called Ellynn.I am a poet in my thoughts,but a klutz in my speech.I am brave and full of backbone in my mind,but in reality I can hardly find the courage to express what I really think.I relate to spineless gelatinous blob seeping into nothingness.I just want the whole world to compromise,and River Phoenix to come back to life and teach me how to live for the experience of living,not to live for the experience of being someone else's girl.

My thoughts jerked to a tumultuous

halt as Mother slammed on her breaks,cursing a blue whirlwind that circulated high above the state of South Carolina,which we happened to be passing through,following my Uncle Gary and his son Jed driving our stuff in the U-haul up ahead.

"Freaking idiots! Get off the road if you ain't going drive the posted speed." Mother turned to me. "Don't they know that on an interstate you're supposed to drive five miles over! Must be drunk or something! Should get off the road! Moron!" Her pure Forrest Gump accent flared up when she was upset.She passed the slow Volvo station wagon and began fervently pushing at the buttons with curled, fake nails, until she spoke in an exasperated tone, "Maryse Ellynn, reach back there, baby, by your sister's leg and get my case of cds." I rolled my eyes,and wished that my Mother would cut out the two name deal and call me Ellynn, like everyone else did.I hated the name Maryse.

Mother is real big on several certain things that govern whether or not her mood is jovial.The first rule of Mother's happiness is that she likes her mahogany-colored hair to be big, almost to skyscraper capacity,like a chick from a really bad Whitesnake video.Big hair requires equally loud make-up, so Mother spackles her face in a thick powder creme base every day of the year,along with big black Cleopatra lines to bring out her blue eyes,completed with dark caky mascara on her lengthy lashes.She occasionally wears blush and pink eye make-up that some woman from Mary Kay told her "makes brunettes like her look sensational! Why Lynda Carter, Delta Burke, or even Jackie Onassis wouldn't leave their houses without it!"

Mother probably had no idea who Lynda Carter, Delta Burke or Jackie Onassis were, since her television viewing was limited to MTV, trash talk shows like Jerry Springer and Richard Bey, Roseanne,and "classics" like the Dukes of Hazard and HeeHaw.The only reason she bought and wore the pink stuff was because the lady assured her that Daisy Duke herself the exact same shade of pink on her cheeks and eyelids.Mother thought she looked like Daisy Duke, I thought she looked like Jodie Foster in Silence of the Lambs,and acted like Jodie Foster at the beginning of The Accused.This make-up hair combo made Mother's mood change to sunny in an instant,but in todays traffic it did not seem to be working.

Mother's second rule was play loud,awful 80s metal music in any stressful situation. Mother loved all the has been bands like Poison,Motley Crue with Vince Neil,Warrant,Winger, Skid Row,Guns N' Roses,Whitesnake, Nelson,Slaughter, Ratt,and other various pretty boy groups.She also loved Vixen and Lita Ford,especially when Lita dueted with Ozzy Osbourne,who Mother thought was a genius.I didn't mind her playing stuff like Stone Temple Pilots, Metallica,Pantera,or sometimes L7 or Lita,but the other stuff sucked and was embarrassing to admit to liking..let alone owning.I handed Mother her cd case as she drove with her knees, thumbing through her collection until she stumbled upon Guns N' Roses, Appetite for Destruction,a true classic in my Mother's opinion.She passed it to me,through a lighted cigarette's cloud of smoke, "Maryse Ellynn, baby, put this one in the player for me."

I shuddered,dreading listening to "Welcome to the Jungle" for the whole rest of our trip.My sister Elise and I kept trying to tell Mother that 80s glam metal had either perished through tragic consumption by those demons known as big egos and no talent, or, like Axl Rose, lost too many vital brain cells to function properly in society,due to wearing cheap imitation leather spandex outfits.

Mother does not listen to our pleas,simply firing back at us that all so-called bad trends eventually resurface,and that is her reason for continual devotion to such crappy music.Elise will counteract her argument by saying how Mother likes Nine Inch Nails or Marilyn Manson,and surely that type of person cannot stand to listen to glam metal,and they will argue on until I begin to wish Guns N' Roses was playing again.

Everyone in my family had an immature obsession with something or someone, specifically if they belonged to the entertainment industry.Mother and Elise thrived on music,whereas I am a regular movie addict.Escape was important in my family's routine,so the urge to submerge into some certain fantasy's welcoming arms are regularly encouraged as an alternative to reality.I began to pretend I am in My Own Private Idaho, motoring down some highway with River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves,or like in that movie, The Doors,I am going to see some profound vision of an Indian that will haunt me for the rest of my life-anything to drown out my Mother's singing and that horrible Axl Rose whining.

"State line!" Mother yelled over the music.I looked back at my sister Elise,who was under the security of her portable CD player's headphones,sketchbook in lap,drawing a picture of her fetish,Twiggy Ramariez,guitarist of Marilyn Manson.Elise was fifteen going on twenty, a teenager who thought she knew more about life because she watched Oprah and could understand some of the "adult" subject matter.She used to be normal-looking: butterscotch freckles on her milky skin,light reddish-blonde hair that could challenged Shirley Temple in a war of the ringlets,and haunting blue eyes.Now she was hardened and jaded in appearance, with shoulder-length obviously died black hair that mingled with individual strips of her hair that were streaked with a punk dye called Vampire Blood Red.Her blue eyes were hidden by colored contacts,and her freckles covered by pale make-up.She had adopted the look of a Marilyn Manson Spooky Kid,as she said, when we moved to Ellensburg, Washington after a brief stay in Seattle.Elise was always changing, always hiding behind something.She was like a best friend and worst enemy to me,almost the daughter I had never had,than a younger sister.She hated moving,because Elise was the one who knew how to make friendships that lasted, and chase boys who actually took notice.She had always been the outspoken one,and reminded me a lot of Mother.But I would never tell her that,because there was a strange relationship between Elise and Mother.Neither one seemed to like one another too much.

Mother startled me as she patted me on my leg. "Baby girl, I'm gonna stop for some gas up ahead." She signaled at my Uncle Gary, in some code they made up for gas stops.He prepared to exit,and I cannot wait to stretch my legs.

We get to the Texaco,which had a sign that proclaimed: "World's Cleanest Restrooms." As I pushed the ladies room door open,I had to think,if this tiny,dimly lit,mildew-riddled, chipped toilet excuse for a port-a-potty was clean,I would hate to see what the "world's cleanest toilet authority" called filthy.I washed my hands with some medicinal bubble gum pink soap and looked at my wind-blown hair that

hung nearly all one length to my waist, poorly attempting to stay in a red and white scrunchie.My attempt at putting Sun-in on my hair had resulted in the ends turning a faded blondish color,with my roots still a dark brown.The blue jeans I wore were wrinkled from too much sitting, and frayed at the ends over my Birkenstock clogs.I pulled at the edge of my Seattle tee shirt,creating a bigger hole in it's red body,as the white puffy imprint of the Space Needle began to flake off.

Not wanting to use the dangerous looking hand dryer near the door for fear of electric shock,I delved deep into a dispenser for some paper towels.Unfortunately,I found nothing but a wadded up blob of gum encased in a tampon wrapper.Wiping my hands on my jeans,Mother passed by me,moving to the sink.She was so skinny,being only about five-foot-five and one-hundred and nine pounds,a pair of ripped jean shorts barely covering her lower body.Her black midriff top clung to upper body's skin as she reapplied her lipstick and gloss,spritzing her hair with Aqua Net.She ran a hand over my hair,commenting on the split ends,while stuffing all her "glamour aids" into her black leather Harley Davidson purse.

"C'mon baby, we're gonna lose road time! Now where's that Ravenna Elise?" Mother wandered mumbling towards the small mini-mart that was near the pumps.I went back and sat in the car,and found Elise propped up in the back seat,her shiny green Doc Martins resting on Mother's prized purple velvet interior.

"This place is almost as hot as Austin." Elise said to me as she pushed her black nails through her red and black streaked hair.She hides her fake,contact-enhanced,green eyes behind a pair of rounded sunglasses,and drank from a water bottle,which I suspected she shop-lifted. "Or maybe it's as hot as Santa Fe, I always get those states mixed up."

"Santa Fe and Austin are cities,silly,not states."I said as I adjusted my view of Elise over the seat."You are only hot because you are in that getup." I said,pointing to her black dress and grungy green cardigan."You can't be comfortable in that. It is August,after all.Still summer in North Carolina."

"When we were in Washington,I could wear this outfit and be comfortable." Elise snapped.She valued her sense of style,even if I thought she dressed like a bag lady.

"We aren't in Washington,we won't ever be back there again and you know it."I tried to get a hold of Elise's water bottle unsuccessfully."You know how Mother promised Memaw that she'd live in that house after Memaw died. Take care of it and all. She made all those promises in the will."

"Big deal. Ellensburg Washington was better than pine tree prison North Carolina.It wasn't as humid,I had friends, good high school to start at." Elise trailed off. "You wouldn't understand Ellynn.You spend your whole life doing what CiCi tells you to do."

I turn back around,I know what's coming. Elise will tell me I have wasted twenty years of my life on nothing–this attempt at life's wisdom spouting from a fifteen year-old who "has lived more than I ever have."*Stand up, Ellynn, do something. Stop being Mother's lackey.*

I sighed, wishing Mother would come back so Elise would shut her mouth,a talent she often perfected around Mother.

"The guy in the store, what a sweet heart." Mother's tones filled the car as Elise sunk back under her clanging music."He said my car was the coolest one he'd seen come through these parts. Said the detailing was impeccable." Mother began to blather on about the car, about it's purple and silver bird, big engine,lighted fluorescent license plate,tinted windows,even the bumper stickers she told this poor guy about.Then I thought about her third rule for happiness: having a man to flirt with and get something from,preferably for free.I waited for the unavoidable climax to her story,watching Uncle Gary and Jed emerge from the Mini-Mart with enough Mellow Yellow and Doritos to feed the entire state of North Carolina.

"I told him we were moving to New Hill,and he gave me some free maps of NC,not to mention I only paid half for the gas." She seemed so proud as she announced these minute things.Mother continued to talk,almost to no one in particular as she watched Uncle Gary back out from his space next to our car,heading for the expressway exit.

Once we were back on the highway,I glanced out the window,noticing the millions of pine trees and thinking,Elise was right: North Carolina was a pine tree prison–the bars of wood and clumps of green needles being so thick one could barley see their destination if a passageway were not chiseled before him or her.In Ellensburg, Washington,our last home,the pine trees appeared as if they were screaming: undulating in the wind,the knots in their wood looking like contorted faces pleading for release.At least these North Carolina pines were not so vivid to me,in the sense that before I felt I was one of those Ellensburg pine trees. Having nothing to identify with in this state would make it easier once my Mother's impulses directed her to move on.However, she did promise Memaw she'd care for that grand old Southern house,so hopefully this drive would result in our last move ever.

Chapter One From the Impending Novel:

Living for the Experience

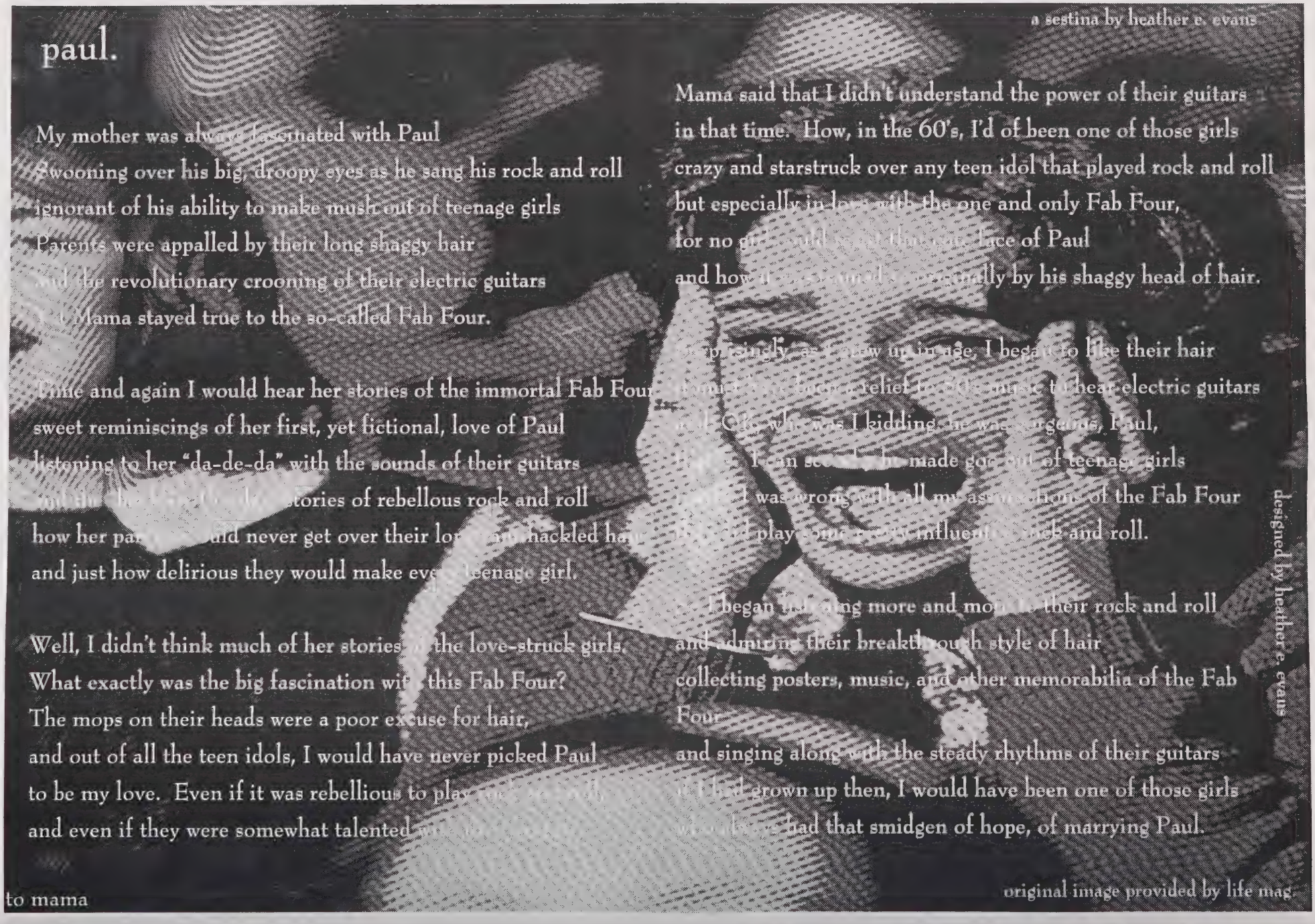
By Samantha jOnEs

dedicated to :LizZ (Frenid), DoOt, pATricK, Mom and Dad, Balthazaar the cat,and that guy who wore support pantyhose on his arms

God's Speed!

design concept and layout: jOnEs

scary trees black and white photography: evans



paul.

a sestina by heather e. evans

My mother was always fascinated with Paul
swooning over his big, droopy eyes as he sang his rock and roll
ignorant of his ability to make mush out of teenage girls
Parents were appalled by their long shaggy hair
and the revolutionary crooning of their electric guitars
but Mama stayed true to the so-called Fab Four.

Time and again I would hear her stories of the immortal Fab Four
sweet reminiscings of her first, yet fictional, love of Paul
listening to her "da-de-da" with the sounds of their guitars
and the [illegible] stories of rebellous rock and roll
how her parents [illegible] and never get over their long shaggy hair
and just how delirious they would make every teenage girl.

Well, I didn't think much of her stories of the love-struck girls.
What exactly was the big fascination with this Fab Four?
The mops on their heads were a poor excuse for hair,
and out of all the teen idols, I would have never picked Paul
to be my love. Even if it was rebellious to play [illegible]
and even if they were somewhat talented [illegible]

Mama said that I didn't understand the power of their guitars
in that time. How, in the 60's, I'd of been one of those girls
crazy and starstruck over any teen idol that played rock and roll
but especially in love with the one and only Fab Four,
for no g[illegible] could resist the cute face of Paul
and how it was [illegible] by his shaggy head of hair.

[illegible] I grew up in age, I began to like their hair
[illegible] relief [illegible] to hear electric guitars
[illegible] I kidding [illegible], Paul,
[illegible] made girls out of teenage girls
[illegible] was wrong with all my assumptions of the Fab Four
[illegible] influential rock and roll.

I began listening more and more to their rock and roll
and admiring their breakthrough style of hair
collecting posters, music, and other memorabilia of the Fab Four
and singing along with the steady rhythms of their guitars
If I had grown up then, I would have been one of those girls
who [illegible] had that smidgen of hope, of marrying Paul.

designed by heather e. evans

to mama

original image provided by life mag

1994. Photographed by Steve Holeman

I have decided that I have one year left to live.I am now a perishable good; a piece of rotting meat waiting to be consumed by the soil maggots and decay-ers that lurk beneath the facade of the graveyard.I know I am going to hell. I need to be purged and destroyed because I engaged the unthinkable in American society.The thing that kids often wish for when their parents scream at them for making bad grades,or taking away some sort of vital privileges.I killed my parents, and the sadistic fact is,I got away with it and I enjoyed the whole process.

I am not a vicious serial killer,nor did I ever have the desire to kill anyone other than myself. After all,I am the failure of the Almo household. I,Marryss Lithgard Almo,have more reasons to be blown up by an "accidental malfunction" of a GE gas stove, than Wendy Clouser Almo and Houston "Hugh" Almo ever did.I reread every article I collect on the "accident," listening to the voice in my head spew out journalists' creation of my parents history.It has all the trappings of a disaster,and it was a pretty big event for the town of Green Summitt when two of its well-to-do members are scorched like blueberry muffins that have been in the oven too long.

The News and Observer writes that Wendy and Hugh are the perfect high school sweethearts,marrying right after their graduation.Wendy was a beloved employee at Zenith High School–known as the essential front desk secretary.She helped with fund-raisers and cheerleading.Students,who were shocked and saddened at her death, described her as "always concerned about their needs,while acting not like an adult at all,more like a person their own age." Her husband, Houston, named for his birthplace, is the best seller of real estate in the Carolinas. A Texas import who lived in North Carolina since he was twelve,Houston played football for Zenith High when he and Wendy went there in the early 60s.Then he went to North Carolina State and was expected to make the Pro football league, until an unfortunate knee accident that would leave him with a limp for the rest of his life.He devoted himself to building his father's small real estate firm into the next Century 21. The Almo's had enough money to be comfortable, but they always wanted a big family.Thoughts like these were quenched when it was discovered that Wendy had blocked fallopian tubes.She underwent several treatments,but no baby luck.Then, Wendy thought about adoption, there was a stressed time in her marriage to Hugh,and I was born in October 30, 1976.Apparently the last fallopian tube treatment worked.My father was disappointed I was not a boy.

The words loyal, honest, true lovers,and family-oriented are repeated about my parents.A layout of them in Time Magazine, is complete with their wedding picture, teen prom picture, and my mom smiling, holding baby miracle me. It is even more sickening than the "Heather Chandler yearbook spread" from that Christian Slater movie *Heathers*. Tragedy in Carolina, is the title of Time article.I am mentioned several times,but I donot remember being interviewed. Then I read,Marryss Almo, their only daughter, age twenty,still resides not to far from the site of the accident. The glossy page shows a picture of me, in a hand-me-down dress at the funeral. I am the only one not crying.

Before the "accident" I lived on my parent's property,in one of their small rental prefabricated houses,an overweight,five foot seven and half, blob who worked at a video store.I am almost a manager,I had worked there for so long.It was no Blockbusters,just a little local place so that Green Summitt folks would not have to drive to far from their farms to rent the latest movies.I am the expert on all movies: from the small indies to the mainstream big-budgeters.Wendy and Hugh were not too proud,I was supposed to grow up to be in real estate like Hugh,or go to secretarial college like Wendy.Instead I worked in a place that was between a post office,two dueling gas stations, and their church.I drove one of my Uncle Ray's refurbished late 1970s Lincoln Town cars, and had my GED.I did not bring home any football jocks or Polo frat boys,I was awkward around males. But I knew enough about sex to get along in the world from all my fathers friends forcing me out of preserving my ignorant innocence."

I am the one brought down to identify the remains of Wendy and Hugh Almo. The police officer,Jarred,is a friend of Hugh's.He had known me since I was five.He always held an interest for me,especially when I was younger. He was one of the ones who cheated me out of my virginity; a typical, red-neck white trash kiddie screwer.Jarred told me that Jesus would smite me down if I told anyone.My contempt for religion spurred at an early age.

Jarred thinks he is the authority on me,and kept telling the other officers that I was in shock over my parents death,as I moved down the hall towards the morgue.That was the reason I was hardly speaking to anyone. Jarred kept repeating. I was thinking,I cannot believe that my plan worked.I had fought with Wendy that morning,about my wanting to leave Green Summitt for good and go out to Seattle.

"Marryss,what good will that do you? We don't have any people out there to help support you." Wendy always took her wedding anniversary off from work.So did my father.She cooked him a special breakfast of ham and pancakes.Wendy was using her new stove,the anniversary present. "What can you do out there without your family?" Wendy shook her head. "If only you hadn't sabotaged that cheerleading try-out,you'd be a a whole different person."

You'd be a whole different person was my cue to tune out. I bombed the cheer-leading tryout by squashing the pyramid,I told them they should have put me in bottom.It was hilarious to see such a big,clumsy lump crashing down all those bottle blonde bimbos.

"I know I'd be able to do something better,Wendy." I lit a cigarette.

"Don't smoke. Damn it Marryss,your father is trying to quit." Wendy plucked the cigarette from my mouth, took a drag,and the quickly extinguished it. And my name is "Mother" to you."

I rolled my eyes as I casually put the cigarettes on the table,with the matches.Wendy continued to scold me. "You have all these dreams,Marryss. You are too lazy to try and realize them.Why don't you do something within your capabilities." Wendy had left the stove on before, but Hugh had smelled the gas and shut it off.It was a minor catastrophe.The ham popped,and grease splattered on Wendy's arm,diverting her attention away from smashing my self-esteem.Hugh's heavy slipper-clad feet plod into the room.He swipes the cigarettes when Wendy's rinsing the grease off her arm. I crack a smile,thinking to myself,His death and tipped into his pocket.

The hall that leads to the morgue is long and looks like it was last decorated when yellow and orange were in style.People whisper about me when I pass.The narrow hallway ends at the silver metal doors that remind me of the entrance to a fancy kitchen.I look up to see two cops escorting a man in tight black pants and a faded Siouxsie and the Banshees shirt out from the morgue.He is staring right at me,a piece of his blue-black hair falls in front of his eyes and he uses one of his fingers to push it away.He is lanky, and his skin is so white I wonder how he can be from tobacco country.His arms are covered in tattoos and bracelets and I see a burn scar that looks like Freddy Kruger flesh ending at his elbow as we pass.He is a painted doll of a man.

"We're all through in there,Jarred." The larger cop says as we pass.I jump when his voice breaks my concentration.

"Yeah, ain't likely nobody gonna jump up in there and grab you, Messy." Cop humor is hysterical at times like these. My eyes are drawn to the floor.Step on a crack, break your Mother's back, does that phrase apply to Wendy now?

I hear the doll man speak, "I wouldn't be too sure about that. I think somebody grabbed me." His grin is sinister. I like that,and I start laughing. Tears are

PICTURE ONE: GRUESOME CONCEPT: JONES

* L O V E * L I K E * C O U R S ? *

coming,but I am still laughing.Until I choke.

"She's wrought with grief." Jarred sa[illegible] on the [illegible]wrought. Doll man laughs too. Deep resonance reverberates across the walls and drives his force right into me. He keeps [illegible] his shou[illegible] me. "I've been like you." His thoughts speak to me.

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Wendy eats her breakfast, Hugh's almost done [illegible]king about [illegible] with some couple that is relocating from New York. Wendy has perfected nodding to an art form. She moves in slow-motion as I pick up my [illegible] and kiss Hugh roughly he has a cold and I must smell a thing.

"Marryss, why aren't you at work? Get laid off yet?" That's Hugh's favorite joke. [illegible] philosophical purposes. "You Gen Xers, all into this no work, slacker attitude. Keep thinking you'll get a handout from [illegible], Missy." He laughs like Boss Hogg. Wendy is still nodding. Happy anniversary to you too, Hugh. I do not acknowledge you anymore. I've been waiting for this moment. I am not from Generation X. I am a whole other formation. I turn the gas [illegible] up to the precise spot with seductive fingers.

"I'll never bother you again." The last words are the most poignant for people who care about their "loved ones." I did not need to speak anymore. The unlit gas said enough.

***

"I'm surprised there's this much left of them, considering the circumstances and all." Jarred makes small talk. "They were both so near to the stove." He nods at the medical examiner, proving to all but me what the true mind of a sleuth who could match wits with Columbo or Jessica Fletcher is really like in the body of a sloth. "Must've been trying to turn it off or something. You all live so far out I [illegible] the whole place was practically charred by the time we got there." Jarred voice echoes [illegible] silences him, thinking that this matter gets to me, when I recoil. I watch a little spectical-clad man pull back the white sheet. I feel like I'm on Let's Make A Deal. Yes, Monty, I choose Curtain Number One. I stare, thinking about the smell of people who burst into flames, the pungent, sweet odor of freedom through murder attacking my nostrils. I suffocate a smile and nod to Jarred and the little man, thinking I'd cast Rumplestiltskin as the chief medical examiner if this were a movie.

"You sure hold it in well." I look at Jarred as the next sheet prepares to be raised.

"Didn't I learn that from you?" I say as I see Hugh's aftermath. I have picked Curtain Number [illegible] it seems this game show contestant has walked away with two, count them two dead char-grilled parents. Jarred winces, while I [illegible] another smile. The countdown begins.

"Sign these forms and you'll be through." Rumplestiltskin says. [illegible]. I am walking slowly out [illegible] think that Jarred calls after me. I tune him out and head toward the outside steps. The unforeseen embrace [illegible] threaten my [illegible] is now a reality.

***

[illegible] oneliness is not a phase for people who live in its captivity [illegible] lonely people [illegible] crawl out into life, and venture into clubs. They are the ones who stick out, are ill-dressed for the occasion, [illegible] in the [illegible] that part tonight. The club, The Black Dahlia, is [illegible] ville, the first big city from Zenith to Green Summ[illegible]. [illegible] he [illegible] arches on his throne, his black hair up in a peacock ponytail. I am residing in a purple [illegible] of someone else's life. I notice a girl dressed in a cape and a black dress [illegible] in front of the [illegible] as pretty and thin as she. Her eyes are closed and I try to get into her mindset. This night is the first [illegible] not an urge. Some carnal feeling drew me here. Nobody knows me. I am anonymous.

Writing in my little composition book, I ponder about [illegible] episode. All these [illegible] a purpose, someone to share it with, or have enough time to look. I begin to wonder what it would've been like to [illegible] need someone, trust [illegible] unconditionally. I'm glad my time is limited, I'm glad I'm sentenced to death. Maybe in death, I can create solace. The white [illegible] goes up to the bar. I single [illegible] out again, as she gets a drink from a familiar creature. She disappears, but my eyes are fixed on the bartender. He is in all black, [illegible] tailed-back, waist-length hair [illegible] with his long sleeved Black Dahlia shirt. His skin is very pale and I recognize him. He is the doll man from the morgue. I [illegible] see why I'm here.

The Black Dahlia is in the process of closing [illegible] writing, scrawling thoughts. [illegible] some soft funky little dittie that only he seems to be enjoying. He takes his headphones off, and nods [illegible] Hey man, how much longer you gonna [illegible] and Exxie would like to get outta here. We promised Ryan we'd pick him from work."

Doll man wipes the bar. No one has noticed [illegible] better coming obvious. Go on then. Take [illegible] such a ride. I got some stuff to finish up." His voice is hypnotic, dark, and deep.

"Okay, Bryce. Hey, I'll leave the one [illegible] Be sure [illegible] the stuff on the dj's on "Night" and [illegible]." Doll man plops on a bar stool and begins to spin, pulling his hair [illegible] striking [illegible] getting into the so[illegible] hovering in [illegible]. He maneuvers to the music, and [illegible] middle of my book, [illegible] breathing [illegible] and [illegible].

Once I can pry my lids open [illegible] are black with [illegible]'s, like smol[illegible] to get out of here. I have seen Satan, he's [illegible].

"Wait. I'm sorry I startled [illegible] you. He is [illegible] from [illegible] and I begin [illegible] seen you somewhere before. Right?" He [illegible] icy.

"I don't think so." I mutter [illegible] here." I try to avoid his eyes.

"I remember you, I would [illegible] your face." His fingers are spreading [illegible] cheek. "You want a drink?"

I shake my head. "[illegible] up. You're busy cleaning."

"Actually I was [illegible] to turn off that equipment up there." He [illegible] to the dj station. "I really like this song [illegible] Bryce LeGault." He retracted his hand from my face.

"Marryss, [illegible] time. Listen, I'd better go. Thanks for the drink." [illegible] myself and did not look back. I did not know if Bryce called after me or not. I just had to get to the open air. It was a mistake to come outside of my [illegible] to come into contact with reality. I walked to my car, and started to get in. Something drew my eyes back to the door. Marryss, why did you leave? [illegible] who was talking now? Was Bryce in my mind, had he taken me over? Bryce stood in the doorway, a streetlight casting a cream glow down upon [illegible] of his stare made me feel warm and frightened. Still throughout I was intoxicated. I rose up toward him, and said five words that would seal my fate. "You [illegible] someplace?"

Bryce smiled and I unlocked the door. "So where are we going?" I asked. Bryce closed the door and slid close to me in the seat. He pulled my dark hair back from my neck and began to kiss it in between touches with his lips he rasped, "I've got a place I'll show you." I waited to go numb, that's what I did when I was cho-

DOLL COLLAGE, DISTORTION: EVANS

sen by men in this fashion.But I wanted more with him.Bryce turned my face to his.I was swallowed by his lips, taunted by his tongue. His multi-ring clad hand snaked into my hair,and became entangled.The car idled and coughed.

Lust incarnate can consume the conscience from a rational mind,anticipating fulfillment."Touch me."I edge away from Bryce on the bed.He is shirtless,and his head has just emerged from my chest."I want you to feel me." I shake my head, and he pulls me to him.

"I can't, Bryce, I just don't want you to see me. I can't I can't." I am ashamed.I've never been involved in consensual sex.I've never wanted to actually please someone so much.I'm not able to fake.

"Marryss, we ARE practically in the dark. I can barely see you now, my sweet." Bryce is smoothing my hair, "I've waited for you so long. Suspended in possessing you.A black light is reflecting off some posters,and an overhead fan makes a few candle flames waver.I gripped Bryce's hand, tasting his fingers through my pores.Now I knew what it was like to be inflamed for someone.Bryce stood up away from our embrace,and began to unbuckle his pants. His arms were twisted with tattoos that formed a second inked skin pattern up onto his back.He kneeled before me, bare and pale.

"Let me take these off, Marryss," Bryce's hands were on the body of my dress and my fishnet stockings. "We won't have any amusement with them on." I shuddered,thinking about Jarred.He had cut me there.I began to push away,and I felt Bryce's back.The skin was bumpy,like burned flesh.

"I CAN'T." I heard myself almost shout.I closed back up and started to redress.Bryce stopped me.

"You think I'm a freak, don't you?" He was angry,frustration etching his voice. "It's these scars." Marryss,I can't help them.They are part of me.

I grabbed at my head.How could he get in my there,his voice tracing patterns in the concaves of my brain.I began to cry a little,and Bryce eased his way beside me on the bed.I stared into his eyes,and heard my voice going into his head.It's not you. I don't want you to see me, I'm ugly, flawed...

Bryce shook his head. "No. You are wrong." His voice was guttural.Bryce kept repeating it,until I was naked, my clothes lost on the floor.You are flawless, Marryss.Bryce moved onto his side, and layed me on my side. Suddenly, he slid down the bed, disappearing into the darkness.I wished I could give in when Bryce reached me.The whole room was a oscillating reflection of candle flames and the flickering black light. Bryce came back up to me and moved himself over my mouth as I overtook him.Saliva mingled with pressure and humid breath.I wanted Bryce,but it was far beyond physical lust.I needed someone like him like an addict needs his or her drug of choice.Bryce made me not regret turning up the gas or torturing my parents with a fiery death.He was like a savory cigarette before the firing squad.

I lay next to Bryce,my head on his blanched chest."I'd better go home."I said in a low whisper."I have to work tomorrow."Bryce grabbed me back with his arms.

"Stay a while longer, Marryss." I gave into his words as I relaxed into him.

"All right.But I should go soon."I closed my eyes."Thank you for not.." my voice trailed off. "Others would have been.."

"Upset, no, I'm not."I felt a small peck on my shoulder. "I know what it's like to be a product of defamation."

I turned to face Bryce,my hands on his chest. "Who did that to you?"I touched his arm where the burned flesh started.Bryce looked at his arm.

"It happened because I was chosen first.She believed in blistering the children,to cloak her imperfection" I kissed his scar and he stroked my hair."But I let the skin heal." He hesitated on the word heal."I remember you, Marryss. You were at the morgue when I was identifying my father and sisters.Your old man and old lady got fried in some house fire,I think I read that in Time Magazine."

"Your father and sisters are .." Bryce silenced me with a somber nod,then a wicked laugh.

"They think my old lady torched them like she did me.Stupid pigs.Stupid press.All fools." We kissed again. "I can wait for you. We are similar, you and I We both wanted escape to equal forgiveness."

I nodded. "They never helped me, Wendy and Hugh.They never knew about Jarred cutting me, forcing me to.." Bryce put his finger over my lips.

I went limp from exhaustion and found myself trapped in a Bryce clutch.I had found a kindred without even looking.I was frightened and felt he offset my plans.

Sunlight managed to pierce my eyes open.Bryce was on his stomach,listlessly sleeping.I managed to dress without waking him,feeling the onset of a morning filled with sudden regret for trusting my secrets to a stranger who knew everything before I told him.I pulled a sheet from my composition book and wrote a small artful note,leaving it on a bedside table.I could never handle the morning after, especially not now.I walked out into the hall,and stumbled through the living room,seeing a television set full of snow hissing as two bodies held each other tightly in front of it.I recognized the white-haired girl from The Black Dahlia to be one of the enclasped bodies,her naked back was scarred and pale, and her hair was spread wildly across another body.He cracked his eyes long enough to see me pass,and exit.I drove the long road back to an empty house,thinking about what I left.Salvation was foregein to me.Once I was home,I showered and wrote the whole thing down.Some little remembrance for someone to read later on after my year disintegrated.I went to work and tried to pretend that I wasn't thinking about Bryce.Even though he devoured my thoughts demonically.

I droned through my life for three weeks without even passing by The Black Dahlia or trying to find my way back to Bryce's house.I did go to the library and look through old microfiche about his father and sisters' deaths.His mother,Grace,was a sadist with fire,a woman who liked inflicting pain on people through burning scarification.She had no real psychiatric problems,just a liking for implementing pain.Grace had burned Bryce as a boy,with some cleaning fluid from her maid service job and a cigarette,a newspaper article said.She had skipped out on her bail,and apparently tried to finish off the rest of the family by burning each and everyone of them alive before her eyes.She was sentenced to life in prison,and currently in a maximum security facility out of state.A picture of Bryce as a boy was in the corner of the article,under the caption,Only Surviving Son Still Lives at House Where Family was Burned.I printed out the article and reread it,placing it along side the collection I had on my parents.I began to wonder if I should've left him.

"Marryss, this envelope's for you." Kelleigh,one of the girls I work with at the video store hands me small white envelope,with my name written on it in obscure characters.I divert myself from the refiles,and handle the envelope gingerly.

"Where'd you get this?" I ask Kelleigh as she tosses her greasy dirty blonde hair.I am afraid its another crank letter from people obsessed with my parents death,or worse yet,something from Jarred.

"Some chick with white and purple hair gave it to me when I went to pick up our lunch at Snoopy's." I immediately thought of the girl from The Black Dahlia,the one who had been sleeping in Bryce's living room. "She was in this old blue Impala with three other guys.She told me to give it to you, then they split."

"Why didn't you give it to me right after you got it?"I though outloud,thinking that she had that note since before twelve."Did you read it?"

"No Marryss, I have better things to do." I thought Kelleigh was lying.I noticed I was becoming paranoid since Wendy and Hugh had died."Now, I'm gonna go help that customer." Kelleigh was curt with me,but I was too interested in reading the note.I smelled it first,the envelope was laced with Bryce's scent My stomach fluttered and flopped.I tugged the envelope open effortlessly tearing a small slit in my finger.A little crimson stained the letter which was scrawled in lowercase,"watch your local news."The author underlined watch all the way down to the bottom of the paper,where no signature,no trace of who wrote this letter could be perceived.

"When I got home from work,I had to turn it on.I wished I had an infinite number of television sets surrounding me so I could get every news program imaginable.What was awaiting me in that box but a reproduced image of some happening that had already passed.I had on WTVD, and Myrium and Larry were talking about the unusually warm winter the Carolinas were having.Had I missed it?I flipped to NCN-17, finding a commercial,I aggressively turned to TV 5.A chipper reporter was giving the top story.

"In Green Summitt today a horrible accident has occurred."I began to have deja vous.I turned the television up as she spoke."In an unexplained twist of fate, beloved police deputy, thirty-five year old Jarred Macon Willis the Junior was severely injured while barbecuing with family and friends in his back yard."

My mouth was dry, what was this woman saying? "Peter Blaz is live in Green Summitt with all the latest details. Peter, what can you tell us?"

"Well, Marjorie, it looks as if police might not think that this "accident" is too accidental. Chief of police David Marino has taken thirty-four year old Patricia Beverly Willis,the victim's wife,into custody for questioning after talking to relatives on the seen who thought they saw her pour lighter fluid all over him." As Peter showed a picture of the women I knew as Patti,Jarred's wife of sixteen years,with a coat over her head going to a police car,I changed the channel.WTVD was adding details.Myrium was talking to Gail Paschal-Brown,who was on the scene at the Willis' front lawn.

"Myrium,it seems that some eyewitnesses to the event said that thirty-five year old Jarred Macon Willis Junior's swimming trunks caught on fire while his wife,Patricia,looked on and did nothing." The camera panned from Gail Paschal-Brown to some footage of Patti being lead from the house under that faded jean coat.Gail described her as a proficient high school chemistry teacher,"No one ever expected this to happen."Gail concluded.

The news fest continued.The Jarred story was on every local newscast, with the details getting gorier as the five-thirty news progressed into the six o'clock newscast.My mouth was agape. Surely this was no accident.

"Sunlight usually makes people energetic.It is as if the intensity of the rays inspires some scene right out of Snow White,with flowers bursting forth with blossoms and smiling giddy dwarfs dancing down the path to mirth. Sunlight was all I was used to since the winter had been quenched suddenly by an "unexpected" warm front.I hated warm weather,and it was especially hot today at work.Time drained me,no one was there to rent videos,they were all glued to the Jarred Willis investigation,which had taken a turn for the worse.Patti was being held on bail,for police had found her prints all over some bottle of flammable substance that was rubbed into Jarred's shorts.The news concluded that Patti had flipped out into a rage after discovering that Jarred was into child pornography.Jarred was alive,but from what I heard on the news,he'd never mess with another child again.It was burnt off,the towns folk rumor mill said.Jarred had tubes up there Nothing was left.I wasn't able to revel,just be in glee for a few moments,then pinch myself.All the while asking,does a condemned woman really get a last wish–even if it's hurtful on another who hurt her?

The phone rang,breaking my thoughts into irretrievable shards. "Kelleigh?" My voice traveled over the isles of movie boxes. "Kelleigh, damn it,can't you get that?" I realized that Kelleigh was no where to be found,and reached for the phone across the counter.My wrist got wrapped up in the cord.

"Hello, Vid-Mart, this is Marryss, how may I help you?" My voice echoed in the phone.There was some static, like the caller was on a cordless."Hello? I'm hanging up if you don't talk."

"Marryss?" The voice was muffled by abrasion. "Marryss, I need to see you."

My heart was making a path to my brain,thumping like Frankenstein feet all the way up my chest and throat.

"Who is this?" I had a feeling, but I wanted to hear him say it.

"Bryce." He paused at my whisper, then spoke. "I have something for you. Something you'll like."

"I don't know if I should..." Bryce cut me off.

"Listen, I'll meet you at Hawkins playground. The one in Zenith park. You know it, right?"

"Yes, Bryce. I know it. But we haven't seen each other in so long." I turned towards the counter,lowering my voice as Kelleigh emerged from the back room.

"I'll be on the swings. At, say, three-thirty. Please come. You won't regret it." The dial tone ended Bryce's sentence.I held the phone until that annoying beeping began.Kelleigh looked over her shoulder at me.

"Dang Marryss. Hang up the stupid phone."

Her voice frightened me.I placed the phone back on its receiver.

"Lincoln town cars have this way of announcing themselves anywhere they are driven,mine is no exception. It gagged and sputtered as I pulled up to the small lot before the playground,watching kids playing on see-saws and slides.Some mothers were chatting on benches,and beyond the playground were a set of rusty forgotten swings.I sat in my car,debating whether or not to just go away.It was too late though,I had already spotted him.

Bryce was facing an empty soccer field,swinging aimlessly,his combat boots getting sandy as he used them to propel him about.He stood out amongst the kids and mothers, and they seemed to be avoiding him.His gaze was elsewhere.I saw the girl from The Black Dahlia, in black bell-bottoms that hugged her tiny waist,and a black and white flower print backless tank top running about in the soccer field–barefoot and screaming wildly.

"JOHN! You'll never catch me."I could hear her from my rolled down window.Her voice was light,and full of youth. "Look Ryan, John thinks he can take me." She yelled to a man sitting on a blanket with a red parasol blocking him from my view.I recognized John to be the dj from The Black Dahlia.The man with the parasol produced a lace fan from a small metal box,and began fanning himself.The girl ran past John,and sat beside the man with the parasol. They exchanged a kiss,while John picked up a kite in the shape of a bat next to them.I got out of the car.I was so enthralled with watching them.I noticed I was joining a throng of children on-lookers staring at them.I split the torrent of children,and walked to the swings.Bryce hadn't noticed me yet,he was looking at the girl and John attempting to fly that bat kite.John was holding her from behind.The man with the parasol was sunny looking the closer I got to them. He was grimacing at the whole scene,flapping his fan impatiently.I reached the swings,and Bryce finally looked at me.

"Sit Marryss." His voice was commanding.I took the swing next to him.I loathed swings.Bryce looked back at the odd threesome,then to me. "Marryss,

why did you leave me?"

I searched for an easy way out.But Bryce could read my mind,he'd know I was fooling.I scuffed my foot in the sand.I couldn't answer.

"I think that this will stop you from running away from me.It will prove to you that I worship you." Bryce took from his pants pocket something wrapped in a white cloth.I put out my hand cautiously.It was heavy,whatever this thing was.

"Should I open it here?" Bryce nodded and looked back at the group.The girl's kite was flying almost into the sun.John had sat down next to the parasol man, calling out words of encouragement. "Higher, Exxie, c'mon sweetheart. Let go. Let go."I unfolded the corners of the cloth slowly.

On the inside of the cloth was a brown leather pouch that resembled a small wallet.I flipped it open and gasped.Inside was a badge, a badge that read Deputy Sheriff Jarred M. Willis jr.I traced the letters with my fingers and clinched the badge.I reached over to Bryce,my hand slicing on the chains that held up his swing.He took my hand and opened his hand.It was bleeding.Our blood mingled,running down his tattooed arm and onto mine.He took his tongue and licked up my arm.I repeated his action up his arm, and took my first taste of being someone's lover. We released our grip, and I wrapped the white cloth around my hand.I folded the pouch back up.I put the treasure in my pocket,and got off my swing.I was in front of Bryce,holding onto the rusty chains that held up his swing.He took hold of my waist,and rested his head on my mid-stomach.His eyes were tightly clinched,and his hands were rubbing my back. You are my lover , Marryss. Mine forever.You ingested me,and now I traipse through your veins.

I slid down to my knees,and take Bryce's face in my hands.I kissed him forcefully,and he drew me up into his lap on the swing.I was his now,I some how felt I had always been his,even before we entwined.I heard little girls squealing with pleasure,and little boys yelling "I'm gonna get you," as I leaned my neck into Bryce's mouth.

I could see Exxie, the girl from the Black Dahlia laying in between John and the parasol man,kissing them both.She finally let the kite go once Bryce and I were a union.We began to make the whole swing set creak and jerk, until finally the rusty chains gave way and slammed me and Bryce to the ground.I began to laugh,and Bryce drew me to his lips.I thought I heard some child say "Mommy, why are those two people rolling in the sand? What ARE they doing?" I could not hear anymore,I could not see beyond Bryce.He proved he wanted me.Bryce LeGault had me. Forever.My vision returned.I could see parasol man,Exxie, and John standing above us. "Charming couple, Bryce, really. " Parasol Man said sarcastically.

Exxie looked down at us. "Bryce. We wanna get outta here.John's gotta go to work,and Ryan's scorching in the sun."

Bryce came up from kissing me and sat up, adjusting his pants."We'll meet you back at the house." He shook some sand from his hair. He looked at me, then them."Ryan, Exxie, get yourself some takeout." I smoothed my skirt. "Marryss and I are going to be busy with other things."

"

I situated myself in the bed with Bryce,Black Sabbath's "Planet Caravan" softly emitting from two stereo speakers.His skin is cold,icy,frigid,when our foreheads touch.I don't know how long we have been in this position, but his eyes hold me in an unforgettable stare.Occasionally, we kiss,consume one another,then return to the stare.

"It was easy really." I feel Bryce's words fall on my lips."For someone who knows all about the capacity of destruction by fire." I listen intently. "While I'm here, anyone who hurts you,Marryss,must die."I heard a little thunder outside.Lightening snapped and jerked like a bullwhip,creating sinewy patterns across his blackened room. " You invited me here with you."Our lips touched. "I've searched across eternity for you." He whispered with his lips still on mine. "I know, Bryce."I touched his face with my hand.I was weary and I closed my eyes.Sleep overtook my body and I began to dream--dreaming a deliberate dream.Bryce was watching Jarred,learning about his routines,his family. Ryan,the parasol man, was there too,almost a blur.Bryce had snuck into Jarred's bedroom, through a faulty basement unlocked outer door.He put something in Jarred's swim trunks,something that he had to wear gloves to do. I tossed in my sleep.Ryan kept watch,occasionally glancing back at Bryce,watching precision with intrepid awe. It was a surreal transmission from Bryce's reality to my conjure in the capsule of the dreaming mind.Jarred came into the bedroom,Bryce and Ryan had safely disappeared somewhere.The rest of the dream was a stain,some creation filmed through Vaseline.I could see Jarred in front of a dome shaped barbecue,with Patti standing in the sliding glass door, watching her kids in the sandbox.Jarred's father was there, a pinched prune smoking an ancient pipe and talking to Jarred's brother about the benefits of American cars.Jarred was in the swim trunks,sweat sliding down his back.

"I feel like I'm burning alive." His voice faded in and out of distortion.Patti carried a glass of iced tea over towards him. "I hate this summer/winter weather. I wish God would make up his mind."

"Take this,Jarred,What is that smell? It's almost corrosive."Patti was the only one near him when it happened.She didn't see Bryce or Ryan watching.Jarred's swim trunks were irritating him.He flailed about,dumping the iced tea down his pants.

"What's all that commotion over here?" Mr. Willis was annoyed his conversation was being interrupted.

Jarred had handed Patti the lighter fluid,which got knocked all over him when he began to panic.The barbecue also got some of the lighter fluid,and caught the back of Jarred's shorts on fire. Screams,agony.Everyone was hysterical.Ryan spoke from his watch post "It was so easy. You have such a talent,Bryce."

I opened my eyes to blackness.Rain was hitting the roof,making small pit pit noises.Bryce was asleep as I got up,putting on one of his shirts and my underwear. I wished I could've been there to see Jarred suffer.Vicariously I was there.I took my book and went into the living room to write this all down.Instant therapy for me,instant suicide for the rest.

"

In the living room, Exxie sat on a couch covered with an afghan. She was in a black satin nightgown, her white hair up away from her face.

"Hey." She said to me as she lit up a cigarette. "You want a smoke? Ryan and John hate it when I smoke. But there sleeping, so I thought I'd sneak one." She held out a pack of Virginia Slims Menthols. I sat down next to her and took one. "My momma used to smoke these." Exxie said as she lit us two. "Nothing like a little nourishment. She'd say that."

"Wendy never really smoked." I inhaled."She was too up to date with the Surgeon General.You know all that talk about cancer and all."

"Wendy was your momma?" Exxie flicked ash into a cup.

"Was. I guess." I studied Exxie. She had cut scars up her arms. The were identical. She looked younger without the make-up, almost like a pixie child.

"I never called my momma by her first name."Exxie touched the end of her cigarette with her fingers."I don't think I ever knew her first name.She was always just momma to me." She turned her head."You gonna stay here with us? Bryce really likes you." She turned to face me. "Bryce was sweet to take us in. Me, John, and Ryan had no place. No place after the accident with Jamie."Exxie closed her eyes and began to repeat something in a mumble.I closed my eyes too.I saw her with a man with long black hair and a kind face.She was holding a small baby, smiling.

"You are all mine now." The baby tugged at her hair. "You belong to me." The baby cooed.Then I saw it turn gray,its skull smashed in.

"Ex, what are you doing in there?" I heard a deep voice ask,breaking my concentration.

"Shit." Exxie put out the cigarette. "Ryan? I'm just talking to Marryss. I'll be back in a minute, okay?" Exxie put her hand on me."I hope you'll stay, oh please say you will. I never really had any girlfriends before.Ryan doesn't like it.He's real jealous." Exxie got up,as Ryan appeared in the doorway,in a floral robe.

"Did you get it?" He implored Exxie,then looked past to me. "We don't smoke in the house." I started to put the cigarette out when Bryce emerged from the hallway.

"It's my house. Marryss can smoke if she wants." He sat down next to me.Exxie went to a table beside the couch and pulled out a curved knife,encased in a metal sheath.

"Always a bloodsucker." Bryce chided Ryan. "Someday you'll drink her dry."

"My business is not your business, Bryce." Ryan shooed Exxie back down the hall, out of my vision. "Why's she here anyway." He pointed at me and disappeared.

"He doesn't like me."I offered the cigarette to Bryce, who declined."Ryan gives me the creeps, Bryce."

"Don't worry.Ryan isn't your concern. Neither is John or Exxie.Don't interfere with them."Bryce kissed me, taking in some of the smoke in my inhale.He released it as he spoke,"Their life force is different than ours."

"Come back to bed,I can't sleep without you there."Bryce started to lead me back to the bedroom.

"Wait,I've gotta go to the bathroom." Bryce pointed me to the bathroom and I startled Exxie.

*** Exxie was weakened,her scars reopened.I felt a need to splice the silence.

"Who was Jamie?" I asked Exxie.She was washing her face and hands in the bathroom.Crimson stained the wash bowl.Exxie ignored me.

"You remember when we shared the cigarettes?You said something about a Jamie."Exxie put a wet hand up to mine.

"Shh. Ryan will hear you.He doesn't like to talk about it."

"Ryan's not here.He's down the hall." I turned off the water."Trust me Exxie.I won't tell him we spoke about it."

Exxie sat down in the vacant tub. "Jamie's my son." She smiled and showed me a small circular picture holder with a picture of a blonde woman and the dark-haired man I had seen in my mind, holding a baby.Exxie put the picture holder back on a chain around her ankle. "I tell Ryan it's jammed.I know how to make it jam so he can't open it. He'd hurt me if he knew I kept those pictures." I offered her a towel,to dry her hands and face. "Ryan thinks I forgot all about Jamie and Peter.Peter was my first.Ryan was so mad. He wanted to be my first. You see I wasn't really interested in Ryan,but Ryan had it for me.I was born to be his." She turned on the tub faucet. It slowly sputtered out steaming water, soaking her in her night gown."He took care of me when Peter split.Peter couldn't stay with Jamie and me, he had to go to New York.He couldn't deal with fatherhood. Like my father." She drew her knees up to her chest. "It was hard being without him after he pretended to want a family.Ryan wanted me to give up Jamie,but John, see John was Peter's brother.He helped us.Felt bad and all about me.Ryan and John were special friends, companions and such." Exxie turned off the water once the tub was filled.The water was red. "I didn't mind, I don't think I really understood at first." Exxie began to let tears trickle over her cheeks."Ryan said Jamie went away. Someone took him.It was all an accident, really." Exxie stopped her story and submerged in the water.She came back up as I wondered what happened to little Jamie.I put a hand over Exxie's hair.

She looked up at me."You do some bad things,and the best gets stripped away from you."She took my hand. "I'm Ryan's.There's nothing I can do now.Nothing..." The bathroom was hollow with tears and sobs.I had never really been close to a girl before.I liked the feeling.I looked up into the mirror and saw him.Vengeance,wrath,anger,a wrinkled concave demon waiting for me.

"You've still got your life."I repeated."Remember that."

*** I was the only one in the store at a quarter till nine.Kelleigh had left because it was so lifeless.Violet,the new girl from Virginia,got off around four–so it was just me.I had spent most of my days since James's accident with Bryce.I couldn't get enough of him,just to breath his air was enough to make the phase on the countdown melt slower. I turned off the televisions.After I counted down the register and locked up,I coerced myself out into the twilight. Sitting on my car I saw John.

"Have you seen Bryce?"John leaned against my car.He was smoking a little. "I thought he was meeting you here. He wasn't at The Black Dahlia." He paused. "I need to talk to Bryce, Marryss, please."

"John, look, Bryce told me he'd be at the house." John began to pace as I spoke. "I was on my way there. Did you walk up here?I could give you a lift."

"I was just at the house. Ryan's ballistic. Exxie's split out on us." John started back for the highway. "I've gotta go. Thanks for the ride offer.I think I'll walk. Maybe I can find her."

John was disappearing into my rear view as I backed the car out of the parking lot.

*** Turning down the gravel drive to Bryce's house,I felt an omen in my backseat,with his hand on my shoulder. The lights weren't on,and it was an uneasy peace.I got out and wandered up the front steps.The door was wide open, and inside I could see a red light zapping on and off.

"I want you to stop Ryan!" John's voice was shouting.

"Please,not again,you're both screwed up." Exxie was screaming. "Let go,Ryan. Let go of him."

"I'm serious John, you can't save yourself." Ryan said.I heard something break.

"Ryan, no.C'mon you know I'm right." John was pleading. "You're on that stuff again.You know how it makes you act."

"John's right. Ryan you are delusional." Exxie was crying.I could hear stress in her voice.

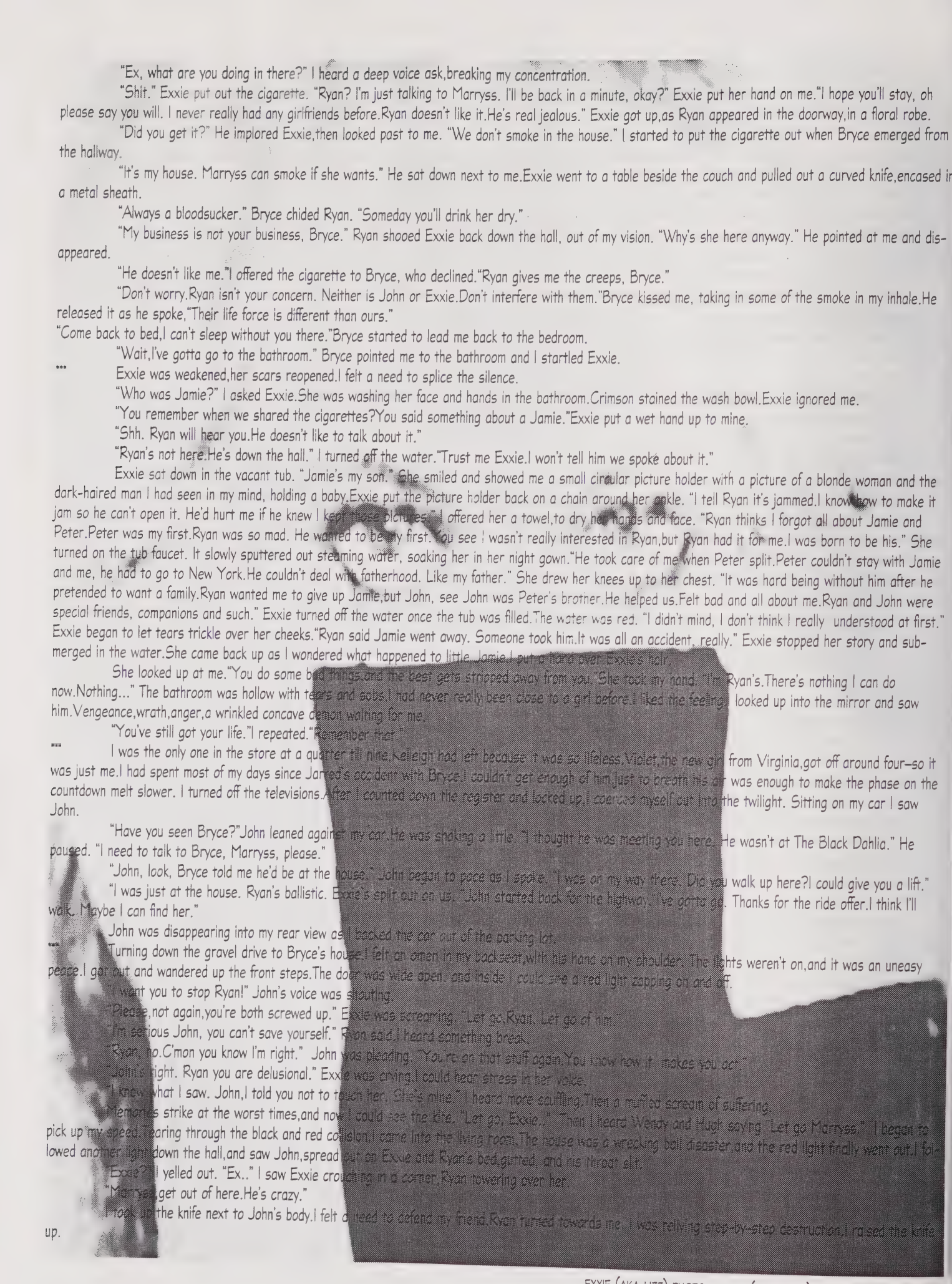
"I know what I saw. John,I told you not to touch her. She's mine." I heard more scuffling.Then a muffled scream of suffering.

Memories strike at the worst times,and now I could see the kite. "Let go, Exxie.." Then I heard Wendy and Hugh saying "Let go Marryss." I began to pick up my speed.Tearing through the black and red collision,I came into the living room.The house was a wrecking ball disaster,and the red light finally went out.I followed another light down the hall,and saw John,spread out on Exxie and Ryan's bed,gutted, and his throat slit.

"Exxie?" I yelled out. "Ex.." I saw Exxie crouching in a corner,Ryan towering over her.

"Marryss,get out of here.He's crazy."

I took up the knife next to John's body.I felt a need to defend my friend.Ryan turned towards me. I was reliving step-by-step destruction,I raised the knife up.



EXXIE (AKA LIZZ) PHOTO: JONES (EVIL EYES)

peter steele/iggy cross picture: taken by john waaswortn original image taken from typ e o negative's bloody kisses/roa drunner records 1993

"C'mon whore. You can't do it.All you are is a coward.You couldn't even stick around when you offed your.." Before the words parents escaped his lips I had sliced his arm.Blood flew back on my face.Ryan felt no pain.He reached up with his good arm and had my neck.I dug my hand into his injured arm.The knife dropped over near Exxie. She picked it up as I kicked at Ryan's legs.

"Let her go." Exxie screamed as she slammed the knife into Ryan's spine.He dropped me as I coughed.She kept screaming."How could you let me do this to you?" as she stabbed him over and over in his back and side.Ryan grabbed a shard of mirror and with his last effort,cut Exxie in the stomach before I could reach her.She fell backwards,into a corner.Ryan was pulling himself to me. I saw the knife in his back.Bryce was in the room.Somehow he was there.He took the knife out of Ryan's back.He put it through it his skull.

*** "Marryss? Marryss. Get up." Bryce had his arm around me. I could get up with help,then I looked and saw Exxie,bleeding in her side.She was coughing blood.

"Exxie.Bryce Exxie's still " Bryce made me be quiet.He put me outside on the ground.He had a tourniquet on my side.I leaned back up on my shoulder, wincing in pain.The house was a spectacular burst of orange-red-and blue.

"Get up. C'mon." Bryce urged me.I heard screams,painful screams.I stumbled past my car along the gravelly road.It was in my head,Exxie was burning alive.I saw her,then Wendy,then Hugh.I gripped onto Bryce.I heard a baby crying.Ryan was smashing the baby with a shovel. "Shut up.Shut your mouth." I dropped in the wet grass.Something boomed.Then blackness.

**** Headlights split the darkness.My eyes were slitted, and I closed them."Don't do that." Bryce shook me. "C'mon, Marryss." He put me to his chest."I don't know what to do now." He was rocking me."I thought I could stop it from happening.It was unavoidable." The headlights were coming closer."I never wanted you and I to end like this." He kissed me.

"Without the threat of death,there's no reason to live at all."I heard echoing through the dark as I reached a bloody hand up and touched Bryce's face.He was bleeding on his side.

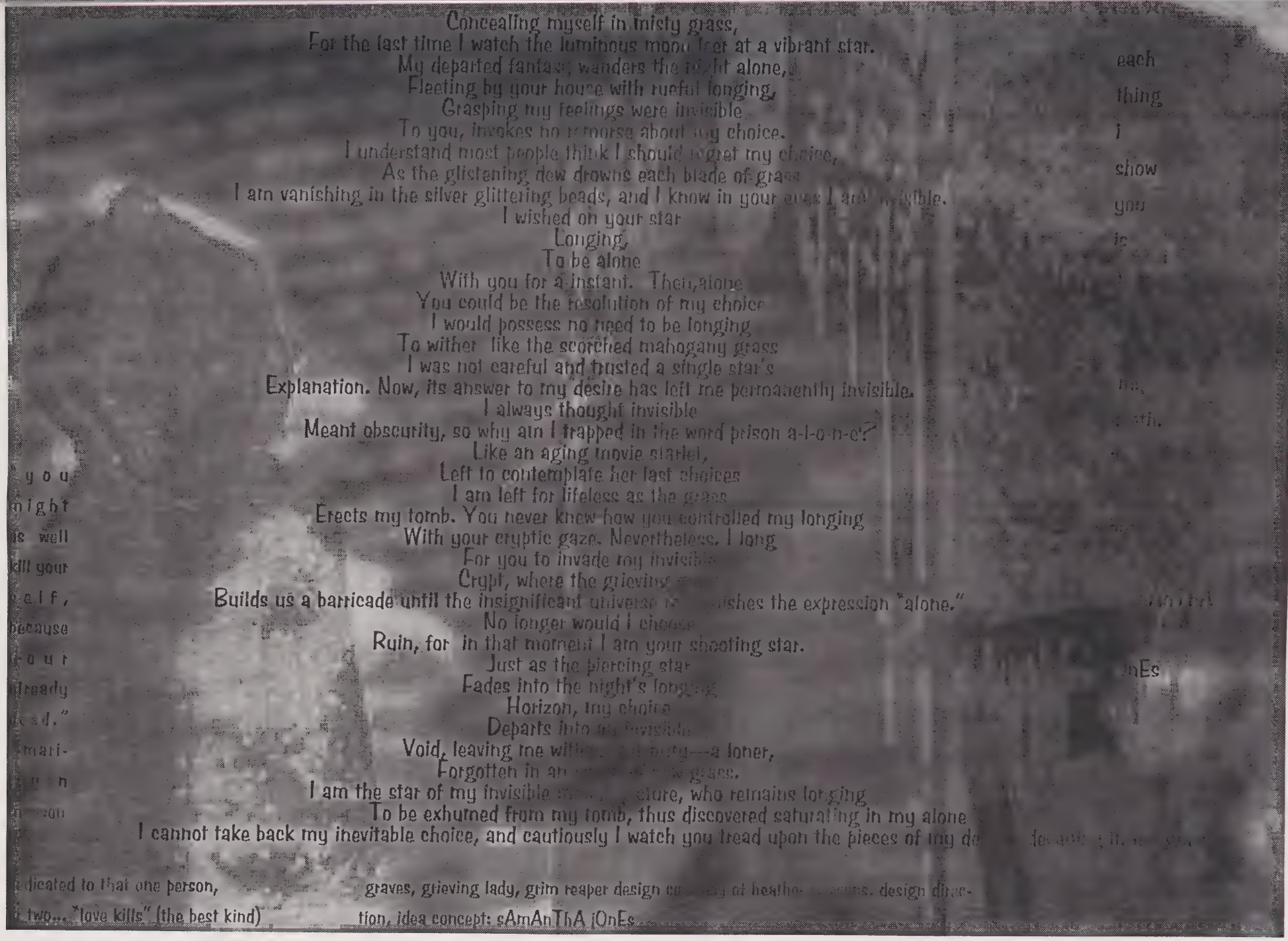
"Great Jeohosaphat! You kids there all right?" A farmer in an old Chevy truck, the owner of the headlights, pulled over next to us. His headlights were shining on me and Bryce. "I seen a big light out there in the forest, and thought it was one of them UFO's or something." He smelled like beer.

"We're bleeding to death, is there a hospital near by or a morgue?" Bryce smiled at the man.

"Well, there's a clinic in Green Summitt next to the police station.I could take you folks up there."

Bryce moved me into the back of the truck, and made a greasy rag into a make-shift bandage.The farmer began to drive.I heard on the farmer's radio song lyrics saying "Each thing I show you is a piece of my death." My year was over.****

this story was brought forth from the mind of sAmAnThA jOnEs, literary editor-in-chief of the Prism 1996-1997. I respectfully dedicate it to those who actually bothered to support me in my effort to get it published: LizZ, Heather (for designing, being creative, and supporting the Prism), Mom, Prism staff ,and Patrick (the only one who I created this menagerie of words for, my die-hard, # 1 fan <wink>) "read with an open mind, for a closed mind is an ignorant one." sj



Concealing myself in misty grass,
For the last time I watch the luminous moon leer at a vibrant star.
My departed fantasy wanders the night alone,
Fleeting by your house with rueful longing,
Grasping my feelings were invisible
To you, invokes no remorse about my choice.
I understand most people think I should regret my choice,
As the glistening dew drowns each blade of grass
I am vanishing in the silver glittering beads, and I know in your eyes I am invisible.
I wished on your star
Longing,
To be alone
With you for a instant. Then,alone
You could be the resolution of my choice
I would possess no need to be longing
To wither like the scorched mahogany grass
I was not careful and trusted a single star's
Explanation. Now, its answer to my desire has left me permanently invisible.
I always thought invisible
Meant obscurity, so why am I trapped in the word prison a-l-o-n-e?
Like an aging movie starlet,
Left to contemplate her last choices
I am left for lifeless as the grass
Erects my tomb. You never knew how you controlled my longing
With your cryptic gaze. Nevertheless. I long
For you to invade my invisible
Crypt, where the grieving
Builds us a barricade until the insignificant universe
No longer would I choose
Ruin, for in that moment I am your shooting star.
Just as the piercing star
Fades into the night's longing
Horizon, my choice
Departs into my invisible
Void, leaving me with
Forgotten in an
I am the star of my invisible
To be exhumed from my tomb, thus discovered saturating in my alone
I cannot take back my inevitable choice, and cautiously I watch you tread upon the pieces of my de

each
thing
I
show
you
is

you
might
as well
kill your
self,
because
your
already
dead."
mari-
on
con

nEs

dicated to that one person,
two... "love kills" (the best kind)

graves, grieving lady, grim reaper design
tion, idea concept: sAmAnThA jOnEs

The Prism staff is a small group of people with a vision. The vision is quite grandiose and with hard core reality has shattered in the process of making this magazine quite a bit. So in result you have a publication full of passion and love for the arts, as well as flaws, because we're humans trying to take contol over technology. We hope that this issue will be a "motivator" for the future Prism staff(s) to reach for the stars and fight for their vision to come true, as we did for ours. The people who brought this publication to you are very courageous since they have bared their hearts & souls, and spit out their guts for the experience.

The writers/designers: Katherine Costa, Samantha Jones, Ginni Smith, Heather Evans, Norma Hiers, and Maja Palej would like to give special thanks to Dan French, who entrusted us to make this publication one of a kind. His support and constant belief in us was an essential part of pushing onward & forward in the process of creating this publication. Thank you. And last, but not least, thank you the audience for being there; reading, looking through, praising, and of course criticizing - in one word-phrase: keeping the publication alive.